SPORTSMAN'S CLUB IN THE SADDLE

BY HARRY CASTLEMON

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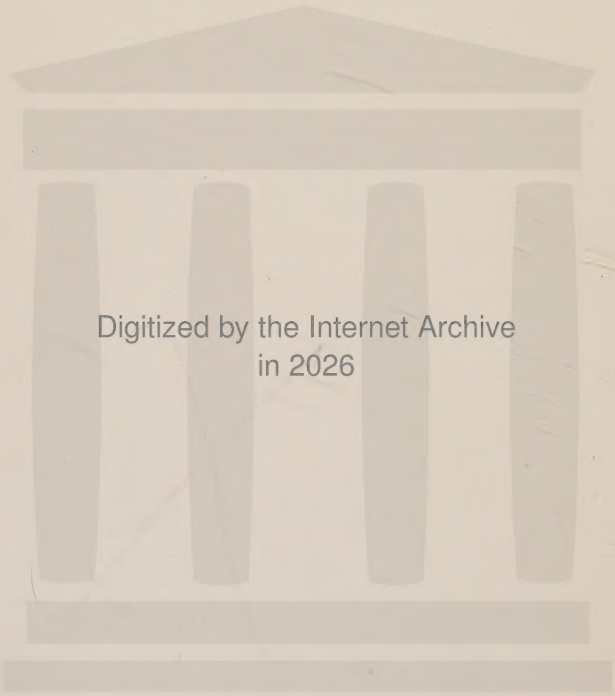

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THE

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IN THE SADDLE.

BY HARRY CASTLEMON,

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

Walter and Eugene . . . . . Page 5

CHAPTER II.

A Midnight Alarm 24

CHAPTER III.

Bayard Bell and his Crowd 45

CHAPTER IV.

Wild-Hog Hunting 65

CHAPTER V.

Perk in a Predicament 84

CHAPTER VI.

Bayard's Plans 105

CHAPTER VII.

Bayard visits the Schooner 129

CHAPTER VIII.

What happened there 149

CHAPTER IX.

Where Featherweight was 166

CHAPTER X.

The Friend in the Corn-Crib 187

CHAPTER XI.

The Siege 201

CHAPTER XII.

How Wilson escaped 230

CHAPTER XIII.

Perk takes a Bath 253

CHAPTER XIV.

Chase turns the Tables 270

CHAPTER XV.

The Revenue Cutter 289

THE SPORTSMAN'S CLUB IN THE SADDLE.

CHAPTER I.

WALTER AND EUGENE.

WHICH is the pleasantest season of the year, boy reader? No doubt you have written more than one composition on the subject, and perhaps you will say, as most boys do, that you like winter best. If you live in the city you can spend your leisure hours at the skating-rink; or it may be that your father owns an ice-boat, and you take great delight in riding in it. Your cousin Tom, who lives in the country, will tell you that winter is the time for him, for he is fond of sleigh-riding, and sees any amount of sport at quiltings, apple-bees, corn-huskings and surprise parties. If you had asked Walter and Eugene Gaylord what

they thought about it, Eugene, who was a lively, talkative fellow, would have answered you something like this:

"We see more real fun in one week during the winter time than in all the rest of the year. The quails, that have been rearing their broods in these fields during the summer, are in prime condition then, and if you ever handled a shot-gun or owned a setter, you know there is no sport in the world like shooting on the wing. Wild turkeys are plenty, also. They come into the hills about here to feed on the beech-nuts. It is time then to set traps for minks and to go coon-hunting. Minks are abundant about here, and their skins are worth two dollars apiece. And then, is there any music in the world that can equal the baying of a hound of a clear, frosty morning? That brier patch down there covers more than two hundred acres—father calls it his preserves—it is literally filled with rabbits and foxes, and our club owns a pack of the best hounds in the state. That sheet of water you see over there is an arm of the Gulf of Mexico. I don't exaggerate when I say that I have seen it black with wild geese and ducks. They stay around here during the fall and winter.

All the shooting we can do will not frighten them away, for the bay is an excellent feeding-ground, and it never freezes over. You know the winters are not as cold down here as they are up North. Deer are plenty in the swamp, bears are so abundant that they are really troublesome, wild hogs you can find any day, and panthers are killed on our plantation every winter. And then, if every other source of excitement should fail us, there are Bayard Bell and his crowd of fellows, who are bound that the members of our club shall not enjoy a minute's peace if they can help it. You see, while we were students at the Academy at Bellville last summer, our club defeated Bayard and his crew in a four-oared race for the championship, and that made him very angry. More than that, he wanted to be commodore of the academy squadron, but when the election came off he was badly beaten, and that was another thing that made him mad. He has promised to square yards with every one of us this winter, and we are waiting to see what he will do. I like these long evenings, too. When the wind is whistling dismally without, and the rain and sleet are rattling against the window-panes, isn't it jolly to draw up in front of a warm fire,

and while away the hours with a game of chess or backgammon with some good fellow, or listen to the stories of Uncle Dick, who has travelled over every portion of the habitable globe? O, we always see plenty of sport during the winter."

Two better boys than Walter and Eugene Gaylord never lived, and none ever had a pleasanter home or a kinder father and mother. When we say that they were good boys, we do not mean that they were perfect. We would not give a fig for an army of perfect boys, even if there were such impossible things in the world; but, thank goodness, they do not exist outside of story-books. Walter and Eugene had their faults, and some glaring ones, too, like all other live, wide-awake boys. They had done things they were sorry for and did not mean to do again; and, on more than one occasion—we regret to say it, but candor compels us—they had been seen with very long faces walking reluctantly into the library, whither they were followed by their father, who carried in his hand something that looked very much like an apple-tree switch. But, for all that, they were first-rate fellows—kind, obliging, and good-tempered.

There was a year's difference in their ages, and a great deal of difference in their tastes, dispositions and habits. Walter, the older, thoroughly enjoyed himself in a quiet way, and thought more of a good book and a pair of slippers than he did of the ball club and debating society. He owned a splendid double-barrel, and was an excellent shot on the wing; but he had been known to sit for hours behind his brush-blind on the banks of the bayou, and watch a flock of canvas-backs, which were sporting about in the water within easy range of his gun, without firing a shot at them. He was studying their habits, he said. Eugene, on the other hand, was a wild, uneasy fellow, and he could not possibly enjoy himself without plenty of noise. He was a capital sailor, and nothing suited him better than to stand at the helm of the Banner (that was the name of the yacht he and his brother owned, and a swift, beautiful little craft she was) while she was bounding over the waves of the bay before a stiff breeze with all her canvas spread. He was an enthusiastic and skilful fisherman, a good shot, and woe to the squirrel or duck that showed its head within range of his Smith & Wesson rifle. It made no difference to him what the

"habits" of the game were, so long as he secured a respectable bunch to carry home. He had more than once been capsized in the bay; had broken his arm in an attempt to climb one of the lofty elm trees in the yard; had tumbled over cliffs while searching for sea-gulls' nests; and had fallen into quick-sands, while stalking pelicans in the swamp, and narrowly escaped with his life; but he was hale and hearty still, and none the worse for his adventures.

Walter and Eugene lived in the state of Louisiana, about forty miles from the thriving village of Bellville, in a large stone house which was so completely concealed by the thick shrubbery and trees that surrounded it, that not even its chimneys could be seen from the road. A gravelled carriage-way led from the gate to the dwelling, and then turning abruptly to the right ran down a steep bank to the boat-house. In front of the boat-house a stone jetty extended out into the water; and at the end of it was anchored a buoy, to which, had you been a visitor at the Gaylord mansion during the summer, you would have seen moored a rakish little schooner that held a high place in the estimation of our young friends. And had you seen that same

schooner under way, you would have noticed that a Commodore's broad pennant floated from her masthead; for Walter Gaylord was commander of the Columbia Yacht Club, and the Banner was his flagship. At the time our story begins, however, the yachting season was over, and the schooner, being too large to be stowed away in the boat-house, had been hauled into a neighboring bayou and hidden among the bushes, where she would be effectually protected from the fury of the storms that visited the coast during the winter. She had sailed many a race during the previous summer, and the pair of gold-mounted field-glasses which occupied a prominent place on the centre-table in the boy's room, and which they never neglected to show to visitors, proved that she had been victorions in at least one of them. Her young masters thought that her work for the year was over, but it turned out otherwise. She was destined before the winter was ended, to accomplish something that far surpassed all her former exploits, and to sail in waters and visit countries that none of her crew had ever seen before.

On the floor of the boat-house lay a long narrow object covered with canvas to protect it from

the damp and dust. It was a four-oared shell, the property of the SPORTSMAN'S CLUB. There were people in the village who could say that they had seen the schooner beaten in a fair race, but not one who could say the same of the Spray. Whether her success was owing to the boat itself, or to the muscle and long wind of those who handled the oars, is a question. The club gave all the credit to the boat; and you would have had hard work to make them believe that she did not go faster, and skim more lightly over the waves, ever since that memorable afternoon in August when she wrested the champion colors from the Emma, which everybody imagined to be the swiftest boat about the village. Bayard Bell, the owner and stroke of the Emma, was highly enraged over his defeat. He forthwith challenged the Spray to another trial of speed, and sent to New Orleans for his cousins Will and Seth Bell, who belonged to a boat club there, and who considered themselves crack oarsmen, to come down and train his crew and pull in the race. The contest came off in the presence of the village people and all the students of the Academy, and the Spray walked away from the Emma and her picked crew as easily as though the latter

had been standing still. Then Bayard was angrier than ever, and his city cousins, who had expected to win an easy victory over the "country bumpkins," were astonished. The former declared that the Spray had been rowed in a race for the last time, and Will and Seth said that if they could not beat her by fair means they could by foul, and that when the next season opened the village people would see the champion colors restored to the Emma, to which they rightfully belonged. This threat reached the ears of Walter and his crew, who, knowing what a vindictive, persevering fellow they had to deal with, kept a close watch over their beloved boat, and never allowed a day to pass without spending half an hour in swinging their Indian clubs and dumb-bells.

Outside the boat-house, and turned up against it, was the skiff which Walter and Eugene used when they went hunting on the bay. On the ground near it lay a pile of bushes which were used as a blind to conceal the hunters when they were pulling toward the game. The window of their room looked out upon the bay, and if they discovered a flock of geese or ducks near the shore, it was but the work of a few minutes to launch the

skiff, put up the blind, and be off. In this way they had obtained many an excellent dinner.

About a hundred yards further up the bank, to the left of the boat-house, were the stables where Mr. Gaylord kept his riding and some of his farm-horses, and the kennels which afforded shelter to his hounds. Horses and hounds were made much of in those days, and Mr. Gaylord and his brother, Uncle Dick, took as much pride in theirs as any old English huntsman. Walter and Eugene were well provided for in this particular, and their saddle-nags and dogs were the envy of all the young hunters in the parish. Walter rode a large, milk-white charger, which was like his master in more respects than one. He was as steady as a plough-horse, afraid of nothing, was generally very deliberate in his movements, and on ordinary occasions went along at a snail's pace, his head down, his eyes half-closed, and his ears bobbing back and forth with every step he made. But, after all, there was plenty of spirit in him. Let him once hear the hounds in full cry, or let his rider tighten the reins and give him even the slightest touch with the spur, and the old horse's head would come up, and he would step off in a way that made it

exceedingly difficult for any but a fleet-footed nag to keep pace with him. Eugene's horse was a different sort of animal altogether. He was a small, light-bodied roan, fiery and vicious, and so restless that he never would stand still long enough for his rider to become fairly seated in the saddle. But the two got along very well together. The horse always wanted his own way, and Eugene was quite willing that he should have it.

There were seven dogs in their pack. Six of them were common deer-hounds—large tan-colored animals, staunch and swift; and when they once opened on a trail, how they would make the woods ring with their music! The other was an Irish greyhound, a present from Uncle Dick. He stood nearly three feet high at the shoulders, and was as fleet as the wind. He was good-natured enough generally, but savage when aroused.

The country about Mr. Gaylord's plantation was but thinly populated, and wild in the extreme. His nearest neighbor, Mr. Bell, lived three miles away, and the nearest settlement was at Bellville, forty miles distant. Mr. Gaylord's family had but little intercourse with the family of Mr. Bell. The younger members engaged in a pitched battle occa-

sionally; and their fathers, when they met on the road, merely saluted each other in a dignified manner, and passed without speaking. Mr. Bell did not seem to be on good terms with anybody except a brother who lived in New Orleans (Will's father and Seth's), and who was equally unpopular with himself. He had at one time stood high in the community (the village of Bellville was named after him), but of late he had gone down hill rapidly in the estimation of his former associates. There was a mystery surrounding him that none could penetrate. He was engaged in business of some kind, but no one knew what it was. For two years he had been making money rapidly—much faster than he could have made it by cultivating his orange plantation—and the settlers had at last become suspicious, and hinted that he was engaged in some traffic that the authorities would one day put a stop to.

Walter and Eugene were students at the Bellville Academy—or rather they *had* been until a few weeks ago when the Fire King stepped in and destroyed the buildings, and gave the scholars a long vacation. Our heroes regarded this as a great calamity, and so did every one of the students, for

they loved the Academy and all its surroundings. It was no wonder that they held the institution in high esteem, for the faculty were men who understood the nature of boys, and knowing how to combine profit with pleasure, they had made the school a sort of modern Athens, where muscles were cultivated as well as brains. So varied were the exercises and amusements that the most exacting students could not fail to find something to interest them. For the sober, studious ones who preferred quiet sport, there was the yacht club, and also the classes in Geology, Botany, and Natural History, the members of which spent a portion of each school term camping out in the woods with their professors; and for the active boys, who delighted in violent exercises, there were ball clubs, boat clubs, a gymnasium, and boxing and fencing masters. Walter and Eugene were lonesome in their country home, and looked forward with impatience to the coming summer, when the new buildings would be ready for occupation. Uncle Dick, however, hinted that it would be a long time before they, or any of the members of the Sportsman's Club, would enter the new academy as students; but when the boys asked him what he meant, he

poked them in the ribs with his finger, looked very wise, and said nothing.

The house in which Walter and Eugene lived looked like any other ordinary country house on the outside, and on the inside too, for that matter, except in one particular. Away up in the third story, next to the roof, was a room, the like of which, we venture to say, was never seen in any other dwelling. It belonged to Uncle Dick. It was a neat, cosy apartment, and if you had been conducted into it blindfolded, you would have thought, when you were permitted to use your eyes again, that you were in the cabin of some splendid vessel. Indeed, Uncle Dick intended that it should look as much like one as possible. He was an old sailor, cherishing an affection for the blue water that nothing could change, and he had been so long accustomed to life on shipboard that he found it hard work to stay ashore. His cabin reminded him of his ocean home, and it did not require a very great stretch of imagination for him to fancy himself still on board his vessel.

The apartment was just about the size of the cabin of an ordinary merchantman. There were three small windows on one side of it, and under

them was a sofa, upon which Uncle Dick took his after-dinner nap as regularly as he did while he was the commander of a whaler. The windows on the other two sides were "bull's eyes" — round, thick plates of glass enclosed in iron frames and set into the wall. Uncle Dick always kept these bull's eyes open in fair weather, but as surely as a storm came up he would close and fasten them. One would hardly suppose that a great deal of rain could come in at these small openings, let the tempest be never so furious; but Uncle Dick always thought of the waves he had seen on the ocean. He said he did not want the sea to come rushing into his cabin and spoiling all his fine furniture. When we remind you that the house was three stories high, and tell you that it stood upon the top of a hill at least five hundred yards from the bay, you will know how much probability there was that salt water would ever wash in at those bull's eyes.

There were no doors in the cabin; at least such doors as we have in our houses. A small ladder on one side of the room led up to a trap-door in the roof (the "deck," Uncle Dick always called it), and that was the only way one could go in and out of the cabin. There was one door that opened into

Uncle Dick's state-room, but that was not hung on hinges; it worked on a slide.

The old sailor turned up his nose at a bedstead, and always slept in a bunk. His looking-glass was fastened to the wall; his wash-stand was held firmly in its place by screws; his centre-table, on which was always to be found Bowditch's Navigator, a chart or two, and a telescope, was also screwed fast to the floor, and provided with a raised edge to keep the articles from falling off when the old mansion was rocking and tumbling about in a gale. Walter and Eugene always laughed when they saw this contrivance. The idea that a solid stone house, that had withstood the storms of a quarter of a century, could so far forget itself as to rock about in the wind sufficiently to displace any of Uncle Dick's furniture, was highly amusing to them. But it was no laughing matter with the old sailor. He was in earnest about it; and if he had been on the point of starting with the mansion on a voyage across the Atlantic, he could not have taken more pains to get everything in his cabin in readiness for the storms he would be likely to meet on the way.

There was one thing that did not look exactly ship-shape, and that was a huge book-case which

occupied one side of the cabin. A portion of it was filled with books, and the rest with what Uncle Dick called his "relics." There were at least a hundred articles of every description in that book-case, and there was not one among them that was not associated in the mind of the old sailor with some exciting event. For example, there was a harpoon, such as whalers use, with a long rope attached, which was laid down in Flemish coil on the bottom of the book-case. Whenever Uncle Dick looked at those articles it recalled to his mind the time when that harpoon was buried in the side of a huge sperm whale, and that rope caught around his leg and he was dragged into the water, and down, down, it seemed to him, almost to the bottom of the ocean. There was a condor of the Andes, stuffed and mounted, and looking so life-like that one almost expected to see it spread its immense wings and come crashing through the glass doors of the book-case. That reminded Uncle Dick of a startling adventure in South America. In the same compartment was a lance, with a bright iron head, and a long, slender shaft, ornamented with a portion of a horse's tail. That lance had come from the desert of Sahara; and if you could have examined Uncle Dick's

right arm, you would have found, among the flags, ships, anchors and other emblems with which it was decorated, a long, ragged scar from a wound made by that very lance. A little further on hung the bridle, saddle and turban of the Bedouin who had handled the weapon when Uncle Dick received that wound. There were the snow-shoes on which he had travelled over the plains of the Red River of the North, and under them was the Indian canoe that had carried him and a companion from Fort Churchill, one of the most northern posts of the Hudson's Bay Company, to the Red River settlement. In the next compartment was the Esquimaux sled in which he had traversed many a mile of the ice-fields of Greenland. Further on was the dragoon's carbine he had shouldered at the breaking out of the Mexican war, and the major's sword and sash he had worn when he entered the city of Mexico with General Scott. And so we might go on for a whole chapter, and still not notice all the different articles in the book-case. Besides these, there were numerous others scattered about the room. In every corner, hung upon the walls, and suspended from the ceiling, the eye rested on tomahawks, bows and arrows, and scalping-knives from

the plains; sharks' teeth and pearl-oyster shells from the South Pacific; reindeers' antlers and harpoons from Hudson's Bay; and relics from Herculaneum and Pompeii, which Uncle Dick had succeeded in smuggling out in spite of the vigilance of the guard. In short, the cabin was a perfect curiosity shop, and was a never-failing source of amusement and instruction to the boys who were permitted to enter it, for at every visit they found something new to admire and wonder at. The Sportsman's Club regarded the room as their headquarters. They visited it almost every night to listen to the old sailor's stories; and that was a privilege they prized highly, for it was one that Uncle Dick granted to none except his nephews and their most intimate friends.

CHAPTER II.

A MIDNIGHT ALARM.

UNCLE DICK GAYLORD was a bluff, hearty old fellow, a sailor on the face of him; no one ever took him for anything else. Walter and Eugene thought he was nice to have in the house—he was so good-natured and obliging, and was always in such excellent spirits. And then, what a laugh he had! It was none of your tittering, affected laughs, but a jolly, heartfelt roar of merriment that fairly shook the rafters, and made everybody else laugh to hear it. He was a man a little below the medium height, with very broad shoulders and muscles like a gold-beater's. He always wore an immense necktie and collar, and when he walked he rolled about like a skiff in a gale of wind. He applied sea phrases to everything, and had so funny a way of talking and acting that he kept the boys' jaws and sides aching continually. One thing he did was long remembered by every one of the family.

It was midwinter when he came home from his last voyage, and had his cabin fitted up, and the first night he slept in it a furious storm arose. It was terribly cold, and old Mrs. Gaylord, Uncle Dick's mother (with the maternal instinct still strong within her), thought of her son away up in the top of the building, and wondered if he did not need tucking up in bed. She seemed to forget that long years had passed since she had packed him away in his crib and knelt at his side while he whispered "Our Father," and that during those years her little helpless Dick had grown into a bold, resolute man, had roamed in every climate under the sun, and faced death in a thousand terrible shapes. The mother forgot all this. To her the hearty old sea-dog was still her little Dick, and needed looking after. Heedless of the storm, she found her way to the top of the house and into the sailor's quarters; and after putting extra clothing on the bed, she wrapped the quilts around his feet and tucked the edges into the bunk, to keep them from falling off on the floor—the weary mariner snoring terrifically during the whole proceeding. When she went out she left a lighted lamp on the table, thinking that perhaps he might want some-

thing during the night, and that he could not find it conveniently in the dark.

Shortly after Mrs. Gaylord left the room, Uncle Dick awoke with a start, and with one furious kick and an impatient sweep of his arm, undid all the work his thoughtful mother had been so long in performing. He saw and heard something at the same moment. He saw the lamp on the table and heard the howling of the storm. He had spent four years on his last voyage, and having slept but three nights on shore, it was natural that he should imagine himself still on board his vessel. He was out on the floor in an instant.

"Steward!" he yelled, with all the power of his stentorian voice, "haven't I told you more than once never to leave a lighted lamp about the ship? The first thing you know we'll be in flames. If you do it again I'll put you in irons!"

With one vigorous blast from his capacious chest Uncle Dick extinguished the light, and just then a fierce gust of wind swept over the house, shaking the windows, and fairly making the solid stone walls tremble. This gave Uncle Dick additional cause for alarm. Here was a gale on; the ship, no doubt, was in great danger, and the officer of the watch

had not been below to awaken him. He saw the necessity of prompt action. Jerking open the door, he ran through the cabin and sprang up the companion-ladder. When he had ascended about half way to the top he missed his footing in the darkness and fell headlong to the floor. The old sailor had but one explanation for this accident, and that was that the ship had been thrown on her beam-ends. He was on his feet again in a moment, and once more ran up the ladder, shouting lustily for his mates:

"Mr. Jefferson! Mr. Cross!" he yelled. "Where is everybody? We'll be a wreck in five minutes, and the last man on board seems to be asleep!"

Highly indignant at the gross negligence of his officers, Uncle Dick groped his way with eager haste to the top of the ladder, threw open the door and sprang out upon the roof; but bear in mind, reader, that he did not know that he was on the top of his brother's house. He was not fairly awake yet, and he thought he was at sea and on board his vessel.

Having gained the roof, Uncle Dick stood for an instant appalled at the scene presented to his gaze. A furious gale was raging, the air was filled with

snow and sleet, and the old sailor felt the full force and severity of the tempest in his exposed position, having been in too great a hurry even to put on his hat before he left his state-room. He looked all around for his crew, who ought to have been on deck attending to things, but could not see a single man. He saw something else, however, and that was a range of high hills about a mile distant from the house—a famous place for squirrels and quails, and one of the favorite hunting-grounds of his nephews; but the sailor thought they were the headlands of an unfriendly shore upon which his ship was about to be cast away.

"I've sailed the blue water for thirty years without losing a single vessel," said Uncle Dick, with a groan, "and now I am going to be wrecked at last. I can hear the breakers already. Helm hard a-starboard! Mr. Cross, call all hands. Mr. Jefferson, stand by to put the ship about!"

Uncle Dick shouted out these orders with an earnestness which showed that he was fully alive to the dangers of the situation; but, to his great amazement, he did not hear the accustomed responses, and neither did he see the faithful crew tumbling up from below to execute his commands.

He was fairly awake now, and a vague idea that things did not look natural began to creep into his mind. He glanced at the hills, toward the place where the man at the wheel ought to have been, at the tall elms which lifted their swaying, leafless branches above his head, and then turned and dived down the companion-ladder. He found his way to his state-room, and after brushing off some of the snow which clung to him, he tumbled into his bunk and settled himself snugly between the sheets. For five minutes all was still; and then a roar of laughter that was plainly heard above the noise of the storm, rang through the state-room.

"I've done some queer things in my life," said the sailor, as if addressing some one near him, "but that was the first time I ever ordered my mate to stand by to put a stone house about."

Uncle Dick had a keen sense of the ludicrous, and considering the story as altogether too good to be kept to himself, he told it to the family the next morning; and a merrier breakfast party than that which gathered around Mr. Gaylord's table was never seen anywhere. The members of the household were kept in a broad grin for several days

afterward, and even now the old sailor would roar out heartily whenever he thought of it.

This was but one of the many laughable incidents, of which Uncle Dick was the hero, that happened in the mansion during the year; but if we should stop to relate them, we should never begin the story of the Sportsman's Club's adventures.

Walker's room and Eugene's was in the second story of the house. It was a large, cheerful apartment, nicely furnished, and contained three beds—enough to accommodate all the members of the Club. Any one who had taken a single glance at the room, would have gained a pretty good idea of the tastes and habits of its young masters. The walls were adorned with pictures of hunting scenes, regattas and boat-races, and with flags, pennants and trophies of the chase. In one corner stood a book-case containing a fine library; in another were deposited several pairs of Indian clubs and dumb-bells; and a third seemed to be used as an armory, for it was filled with rifles and shot-guns of all sizes and lengths, each weapon enclosed in a case of strong cloth, to protect it from the dust. Occupying a prominent place over the mantel was the flag which had been the cause of so much hard feeling on the

part of Bayard Bell. It was made of blue silk, and in its centre bore the word "Champion!" in gold letters. It was the handiwork of Emma Bell and some of her friends, and had been made at the suggestion of Bayard, who declared that he and his men could pull much faster if they had something besides the championship to work for. Lucy Conklin, the pretty cousin of one of Bayard's crew, was selected to present the flag to the winning boat. She expected to have the pleasure of giving it to Bayard, who was her favorite; and when Walter Gaylord, with his cap in his hand, and his handsome face flushed with exercise and triumph, stepped upon the tug where she was standing, and approached to receive the colors, Lucy was so surprised and indignant that she forgot the neat little speech she had prepared for the occasion, and handed the flag to the victor without saying a word. The Club thought a great deal of that little piece of blue silk, and were determined to keep it.

It is the night of the first of December, 18—. The boys' room is brilliantly illuminated by four large lamps suspended from the ceiling, and a cheerful wood fire is burning on the hearth, and around it is gathered a happy party consisting of

all the members of the Sportsman's Club. That broad-shouldered, sturdy-looking fellow who is sitting on one side of the centre-table with a book on his knee, and talking to the old negro who stands with his hand on the door-knob, is Walter Gaylord, the President of the Club. He and his companions have been discussing various plans for their amusement, and having decided to pass the next day in hunting coons, Walter is issuing his orders. "You're sure the weather will be favorable, are you, Sam?" he asks.

"Yes, sar; sartin ob it," replies the negro. "It's snowin' now, fast. It's boun' to snow all night, and to-morrow 'll be just de day for tracking de coon."

"Well, then, we'll start as soon after daylight as we can get ready. We shall want a warm breakfast before we go."

"Yes, sar."

"And, Sam, we shall want something more to eat at noon, and we can't very well carry it with us. About half past eleven put the pony into the cart and bring us out a good dinner. Meet us in the swamp at the old bee-tree. Put in plenty of sandwiches, for we shall be hungry. That's all, Sam."

The negro disappears, and Walter again picks up his book, while the rest of the Club resume the various occupations in which they had been engaged, and which this conversation had interrupted.

That curly-headed, blue-eyed boy standing in front of the fire-place, working upon the lock of his rifle, which is out of order, is Eugene Gaylord, who has probably performed as many exploits, and been the hero of as many school-scrapes, as any fellow of his age in the country. He is a small edition of his Uncle Dick, noisy and good-natured, and seems to be literally brimming over with fun.

There are three other members of the Club, whom we have not yet introduced. They are Phil Perkins, Jasper Babcock and Fred Craven. They live in Bellville, and have come up with their horses and hounds to spend the holidays at the Gaylord mansion. The former (who always answers to the name of "Perk"), although he is quick to learn and has always occupied a respectable position in his class, is not much of a boy for books; but he is quite at home in studying up plans for mischief, and can carry them out, too, as well as his friend Eugene. He is the best gymnast at the Academy, and can hold out a thirty-five pound dumb-bell in

each hand. He is a good oarsman, is fond of sailing, and during the regattas always assists Walter and Eugene in handling the Banner. Jasper Babcock (commonly called "Bab") has more than once demonstrated his ability to beat any boy at the Academy in pulling a single-scull race, and can boast that he owns the swiftest yacht about Bellville. Another accomplishment in which he cannot be beaten is in making a standing high jump. He can place a pole at the height of his chin from the ground, and spring over it with the greatest ease, alighting on the other side like a fallen feather. These two boys are sitting with a board between them, engaged in a game of backgammon. They are both experts and rivals; and although they have been playing for years—almost ever since they first became acquainted—the question of superiority is not yet decided.

Fred Craven, the coxswain of the Spray, and secretary of the Sportsman's Club, is a year older than Walter and scarcely more than half as large. He is a jolly little fellow, a great favorite with everybody, except Bayard Bell and his crowd, and always answers to the name of "Featherweight." He is a good bat and short-stop, sails

his own yacht, is Vice Commodore of the Academy squadron, and his record as a student is excellent. No one ever suspects him of being in a scrape, and his influence goes a long way toward keeping such wild fellows as Perk and Eugene within bounds. He now sits poring over his Virgil, and, like Walter, is so deeply interested in his book that he does not hear the rattle of the checkers or the conversation kept up by the other members of the Club.

There is another occupant of the room that we must not forget to speak of, for he bears a somewhat important part in our story. It is Rex, the Irish greyhound which lies stretched out on the rug in front of the fire. The dog always sleeps in the same apartment with Walter, who is the only one he acknowledges as his master, and whom he accompanies wherever he goes. He does other things, too, that we shall tell of by and by.

The hours fly rapidly when one is agreeably employed, and it was ten o'clock before the boys knew it. Long before that time Eugene had finished repairing his rifle and getting all his accoutrements ready for the hunt on the morrow, and after trying different plans for his amusement, such as reading, watching the game of backgammon, and

teasing Rex, he picked up his flute. He was a good performer, and when he confined himself to music, the Club never grew tired of listening to him; but on this occasion, being possessed with his usual spirit of mischief, he imitated the squealing of pigs, the cackling of hens, the creaking of wagons, and produced other doleful sounds that were enough to drive one distracted. Walter endured it, and so did Perk and Bab. The former, with his feet stretched out straight before him, his chin resting on his breast, his eyebrows elevated, and both hands tightly clasping his book, read on all unmindful of what was going on around him, and the others rattled their pieces and talked and played without paying any heed to the noise; but the nervous little Featherweight, finding it impossible to construe his Latin with such a din ringing in his ears, raised a cry of remonstrance.

"I say! Hold on there!" he exclaimed. "What will you take to leave off torturing that flute and go to bed?"

"Well, Featherweight, seeing it's you, I won't charge anything," replied Eugene. "I have been thinking that we had all better go to bed if we intend to get up at daylight. I'll stop. I'll go

down and wind up Walter's alarm-clock, and then I'll come back and court the embrace of 'tired Nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep.'"

"H'm! Shakespeare!" exclaimed Perk.

"Young," corrected Walter, laying down his book.

"Pat him on the back, somebody," suggested Bab.

"Don't do it. Put him out of doors," said Featherweight. "He has violated the rules of the Club by quoting poetry."

Amid a volley of such exclamations as these Eugene left the room and went out to wind up his brother's alarm-clock. Now, the only alarm-clock that Walter possessed was his white horse (Tom, he called him), and the way to "wind him up" was to turn him loose in the yard. He would stay around the house all night, and at the first peep of day take his stand under his master's window and arouse him by his neighing. How he got into the habit, or how he found out which was his window, Walter did not know. There were half a dozen windows on that side of the house, but the horse never made a mistake. And there was no use in trying to sleep when Tom wanted him to get up; for he

would keep on repeating his calls until some one answered them. In some respects he was better than an alarm-clock.

In half an hour the Club were in bed and fast asleep—all except Perk and Bab, who still played away as desperately as ever. Perk came out winner at last, but he was a long time in doing it, and it was twelve o'clock before they were ready to retire. While they were undressing Tom began galloping frantically about the yard (he was as watchful as any dog the boys had ever seen), and a moment afterward one of the hounds set up a dismal howl. This was answered by every dog on the plantation; and then arose a chorus of whines and bays and growls that would have done credit to a small menagerie. While Perk and Bab stood looking at each other, a door opened and closed below, a heavy step sounded in the hall, and Mr. Gaylord's voice rang out above the tumult.

"Hi! hi!" he shouted. "Hunt him up, fellows! Take hold of him!"

Rex jumped to his feet and barked furiously, and this aroused the slumbering members of the Club, who were out on the floor in an instant. They did

not ask what the matter was, for they had no difficulty in guessing at the cause of the disturbance.

"Bear!" shouted Featherweight.

"Deer!" exclaimed Eugene.

"Who knows but it's a panther?" said Perk.

"We'll find out what it is before we go to bed again," said Walter. "The dogs are close at his heels, are they not?" he added, as the slow, measured baying of the hounds changed to a sharp impatient yelp. "Hurry up, fellows, or we shall miss all the fun."

These midnight alarms were not new chapters in the experience of the Club. Wild animals were abundant, and it was by no means an uncommon occurrence for the dogs to discover a bear or wild-cat prowling about the plantation during the night. Indeed, the boys had seen bears pass through the cornfield in the day-time; and a few weeks previous to the commencement of our story, Walter and Eugene stood on the back porch of the house, and fired their guns at a deer that was feeding at one of the fodder stacks.

The boys hurried on their clothes without loss of time, and catching up their guns and throwing their powder-flasks and shot-pouches over their

shoulders, ran down the stairs and out of the house. On the porch they met Mr. Gaylord, who turned and gave them an approving nod.

"What is it?" asked all the boys in a breath.

"O, a bear, I suppose," replied the gentleman. "The dogs have treed him, and if you want a little sport, we'll go down and take a look at him."

There are not many boys in the world who would be willing to go to bed when they knew that a bear had been treed within a quarter of a mile of them. Our heroes were not, by any means. If they could remain up all night for the purpose of capturing a coon, as they had done many a time, they could certainly afford to lose an hour's sleep when they had a prospect of trying their skill on larger and more valuable game. Mr. Gaylord went into the house after his rifle; Eugene ran to the kitchen to bring a fire-brand; Walter hurried off in search of a couple of axes; and the rest of the club busied themselves in gathering a supply of dry chips with which to kindle a fire. In a few minutes Mr. Gaylord came out again, but he moved much too slowly and deliberately to suit the impatient boys, who set out for the woods at a rapid run, leaving him to follow at his leisure. They

found the dogs—probably a score of them in all—gathered about a tall oak that grew just outside the cotton-field. Some of the experienced ones, like Rex, sat at a little distance and looked steadily up into the branches; while the younger ones made desperate attempts to run up the tree, and failing in that, fell to fighting among themselves. A few harshly spoken words, and a flourish or two with the switch Eugene carried in his hand, brought order out of the confusion, and put a stop to the barking and quarrelling.

The first business was to kindle a fire: and by the time this had been done Mr. Gaylord came up. The fire cracked away merrily, the flames arose higher and higher, and presently threw out so bright a light that the hunters could discern the outlines of some dark object crouching in the top of the tree. The boys yelled like young savages at the discovery, and Perk, who carried a long, heavy deer-gun of wonderful range and accuracy, requested his companions to stand back and see how nicely he could lift him out of the tree at the first shot.

"Don't be in a hurry, boys!" said Mr. Gaylord. "Let me have a good view of him before you shoot.

There's something about him that looks suspicious."

"I was just thinking so myself," exclaimed Featherweight, and his voice trembled a little with excitement. "He keeps too still for a bear, and when the fire blazes up so that I can see him quite plainly, I can make out a long, slim body. If I know anything, it is a panther."

A panther! The boys repeated the word in tones of excitement, cocked their guns rather hurriedly, and their fingers trembled as they rested on the triggers. Mr. Gaylord walked around the tree, looking at the animal from different positions, and several times raised his rifle as if he were about to shoot. Finally he announced that they had certainly treed a panther, adding that he was so effectually protected by the branches that it would be a waste of ammunition to fire at him. They must cut the tree down.

This decision had no sooner been rendered, than the hunters proceeded to act upon it. Walter and Bab pulled off their coats, and stationing themselves on opposite sides of the tree went manfully to work, while the others stood around with their guns in their hands, keeping their eyes fastened on

the game, and ready to take the place of the choppers as soon as the latter grew tired. They were all intensely excited—they could not be otherwise, standing as they were under a tree containing a panther, and knowing that he could come down from his perch and make short work with them at any moment. They all thought of the danger, but there was not one among them who had any idea of standing back and allowing the others to do all the work and gain all the applause. A panther was something worth killing in those days. Aside from the honor, there was money to be made by it, for the authorities of the parish paid twenty-five dollars for the scalp of every one of these animals that was killed within its limits.

The choppers were at work upon the tree fully twenty minutes, and during all this time the panther sat upon his perch glaring down at his foes, and never once changing his position. But as the top of the oak began to waver he looked about him uneasily, and when a loud crack announced that it was about to fall, he started up and gathered himself for a spring.

"Shoot away, boys!" cried Mr. Gaylord; "he's

going to run. If we allow him to reach the woods we shall lose him."

Six guns cracked in quick succession, and bullets and buckshot rattled through the top of the oak, bringing twigs and dead leaves down in a perfect shower. But if any of the missiles struck the panther they failed to reach a vital part, for the animal sprang into the air with all the ease and agility of a squirrel, and alighting among the branches of a tall hickory fully twenty feet distant, quickly disappeared from sight. While the hunters stood looking at him the oak came down with a crash, and in an instant the dogs were tumbling about among the branches, searching everywhere for the game, and seemingly very much astonished at not finding him.

"The fun is over for to-night, boys," said Mr. Gaylord, who being an old sportsman took matters very coolly. "We'll go to bed now, and in the morning we'll put the dogs on his trail and follow him up and finish him."

The Club exchanged significant glances when they heard this; but said nothing until they reached the house, and then they stopped to hold a consultation.

CHAPTER III.

BAYARD BELL AND HIS CROWD.

THE members of the Club had one and all made up their minds that the panther should be killed in the morning if he could be found, and they had resolved, too, that Mr. Gaylord and Uncle Dick should have no hand in the business. They had won glory enough already. Mr. Gaylord had lived in the country from early boyhood, and had trapped and shot scores of panthers, while Uncle Dick had more than once tried his skill on lions, tigers and elephants. The Club, however, could not boast of any such exploits. They had shot any number of turkeys, had eaten many a dinner of venison that they had brought home from the woods, and had been in at the death of more than one bear; but not one of them, before that night, had even levelled his gun at a panther. Now they had a capital opportunity to exhibit themselves, and they were determined to show the old Nimrods

in the village that some folks could do things as well as others.

"We'll never have another chance like this," whispered Bab, excitedly, "and we must improve it. I know that panther has some of our bullets in him, and that he can't travel far to-night. Go and put your alarm-clock in the stable, Walter."

"What for? Don't we want to get up early in the morning?"

"Certainly. But if the horse awakens us by neighing under our window, won't he arouse your father and Uncle Dick also? If they know when we go out they will want to go with us, and that will knock all our fun in the head. Trust me—I will have you out of bed at four o'clock."

Walter whistled for his horse, and the rest of the Club went up stairs. Tom followed his master to the barn like a dog, and after Walter had put him in his stall, he returned to his room and tumbled into bed. He did not intend to go to sleep at all that night, but before he knew it he was dreaming of panthers, wild-cats, and all sorts of savage animals. It seemed to him that he had scarcely closed his eyes when some one seized him by the shoulder. He glanced at the clock and saw that

Bab had been true to his promise, for the hands pointed to five minutes past four. While the boys were dressing they stepped about the room very carefully, for fear of awaking Mr. Gaylord, who always slept with one eye and both ears open; and taking their boots in their hands they crept cautiously down the stairs, followed by Rex, who seemed to know what was going on and to understand the necessity of making as little noise as possible. As they stepped upon the porch their hounds came up; and if some one had told them what their masters' arrangements were, and why they were leaving the house in so stealthy a manner, they could not have behaved more sensibly.

It did not take them long to walk to the barn and saddle their horses; and in ten minutes more they were sitting around the fire, which was still burning brightly near the stump of the oak, comparing notes and waiting impatiently for daylight. It came at last, and as soon as they could see to ride through the woods, they led their hounds to the tree and showed them the limb on which the panther had been sitting. They did this so that the dogs might know what game they were expected to follow. If their masters had simply ordered

them into the woods, they would have opened on the first trail they found, and it might have been that of a rabbit or coon. But now they understood that the boys wanted them to follow the panther; and they were so well trained that if a bear or deer had run through the woods in plain sight, they would not have paid the least attention to it. They smelt at the limb and began circling about the tree in search of the trail. They worked faithfully for a quarter of an hour, and then a long, deep-toned bay echoed through the woods, telling the young hunters that their efforts had been successful.

"Hurrah!" shouted Eugene. "To horse, my brave boys, and away! Hi! hi! Hunt 'em up, there!"

If you have never followed the hounds we cannot convey to you even the slightest idea of the melody that filled the forest when that pack of high-flyers opened in full chorus on the trail, or the excitement that thrilled the hunters as they flew over the ground, leaping fences, ditches and logs, each boy urging his horse forward at the top of his speed, in the hope of distancing his companions, and being the first to come up with the hounds when they brought the panther to bay. Walter's nag took

the lead at once, and with a few of his long bounds brought his rider to the place where the dogs had struck the trail. He saw the prints of the panther's great feet in the snow, and every track was marked with blood.

"The chase will not be a long one," exclaimed Featherweight, dashing up beside Walter and reining in his horse for a moment to glance at the trail, "for he is too badly wounded to travel far. Now, every man for himself, and three cheers and a tiger for the winner."

Once more the boys put spurs to their horses and went galloping through the woods at break-neck speed.

If you have ever ridden with experienced hunters, you will, perhaps, have some idea of the manner in which Walter and his party intended to conduct the chase; if you have not, a word of explanation may be necessary. To begin with, they had no intention of following directly after the dogs, or attempting to keep up with them, for that would have been useless. They settled it in their minds beforehand which point in the woods the game would run for, and then "cut across lots," and tried to reach that point before him.

Wild animals have ways and habits of their own that a man who has often hunted them understands. If he knows the country he can tell within fifty yards where a deer or a bear will run when pursued by the dogs, and each of the Club thought he knew just the place the panther would make for when their hounds opened on his trail. While they were sitting beside the fire waiting for daylight, Eugene said that if the trail ran toward the swamps, he would ride for a certain ford in the bayou. That was the point at which deer always crossed in going to and from the swamp, and he thought it very probable that the panther would cross there also. Walter did not agree with his brother, and intended to look elsewhere for the game. There was a huge poplar tree about two miles from the plantation, that went by the name of "the panther's den;" and he was sure he would find him there. Featherweight thought the animal would make the best of his way to a certain canebrake where Uncle Dick had killed three or panthers during the previous winter, and the others thought he would go somewhere else. In short, they had all made up their minds what they were going to do, and each fellow thought his place was the best. They agreed that

the first one who discovered the panther should announce the fact to the others by blowing four long blasts on his hunting-horn.

In less than two minutes after the hounds opened on the trail, the hunters had scattered in all directions, and each boy was drawing a bee-line for the place where he expected to find the panther. For a long time Walter thought he was right in his calculations, for the music of the hounds told him that they were running in the same direction in which he was going; but presently the baying began to grow fainter and fainter, and finally died away in the distance. Then Walter knew that he was wrong, but still he kept on, determined to visit and examine the "old panther's den," when suddenly he heard the notes of a horn away off in the swamp. He listened and counted four long blasts. It was Bab's horn, and judging by the way that young gentleman rolled out the signals, he was very much excited about something. Walter faced about at once, and, guided by the music of the horn which continued to ring out at short intervals, finally came within sight of a dense brier thicket in the lower end of his father's cornfield. There were several trees in the thicket, and the hounds were

running about among them, gazing up into the branches and baying loudly. Bab was the only one of the Club in sight. He sat on his horse just outside the fence, looking up at a cottonwood that stood a little apart from the others, and following the direction of his gaze, what was Walter's amazement to see *two* immense panthers crouching among the branches!

"Are we not in luck?" exclaimed Bab—"two panther-skins to show as trophies of our skill, and fifty dollars to put into our pockets? This is grand sport. I never was more excited in my life."

Walter thought it very likely. He did not see how any boy could possibly be more excited than his friend was at that moment. There was not a particle of color in his face; his voice trembled when he spoke, and the hand in which he held his rifle shook like a leaf.

"Humph!" said Walter; "are you not counting your young poultry a little too early in the season? Those skins, that you intend to exhibit with so much pride, are very animated skins just now, and the bone and muscle in them may carry them safely out of our reach in spite of all our efforts to pre-

vent it. Have you never heard old Coulte talk about panther-hunting?" (Coulte was a Creole who lived away off in the swamp. He was a famous hunter, and had killed more panthers, bears, and deer than any two other men in the parish.) "He says," continued Walter, "that 'ven ze Frenchman hunts ze paintare ze shport is fine, magnifique; but when ze paintare hunts the Frenchman, Ah! oui! zare is ze very mischief to pay!' Suppose those panthers should show a disposition to jump down from that tree and come at us; what then?"

"Ah! oui!" said Bab, with a regular French shrug of his shoulders. "By the time they touched the ground I would be a long way from here. That's our fellow," he said, pointing to the nearest panther. "I caught sight of him just now as he was ascending the tree, and noticed that he could scarcely raise his fore-legs. He is badly wounded."

"Where did the other come from?"

"I don't know; he was in the tree when I came here. No doubt the dogs started him up in the woods, and he ran with the other to keep him company. Now, we don't want to take any unfair ad-

vantage of the rest of the Club, and I propose that we wait until they come up."

Of course Walter agreed to this—not simply for the reason Bab had given, but because he thought it best to have a strong force at hand before troubling those panthers. The other hunters were not a great way off. Led by the sound of Bab's horn, they came up one after the other; and when Eugene, who was the last, made his appearance, they gathered around Walter to hold a council of war. Their arrangements were all made in a few minutes, and after throwing down a portion of the fence, they leaped their horses into the corn-field, and rode toward the thicket. They surrounded the cottonwood, and at a word from Walter, five guns were pointed toward its branches, the sights covering the wounded panther's head.

"One—two—three!" counted Walter, slowly.

The guns belched forth their contents at the same instant, and through the smoke that wreathed above their heads the hunters caught just one glimpse of a limp, lifeless body falling to the ground. One enemy was disposed of, and the fate of the other was sealed a moment afterward, for Perk fired the second barrel of his deer-killer, and fifteen buck-

shot found a lodgment in the panther's head. Two more guns cracked while he was falling through the air, and if he was not dead when he left the branch on which he had been crouching, he certainly was before he touched the ground. The work was easily done, but there was not one of the young hunters who did not draw a long breath of relief when he saw that it was over. They knew that panther-hunters do not often bag their game with as little trouble and danger as they had in securing theirs.

"Well, Walter, we've done it after all, haven't we?" exclaimed Bab, highly elated and excited. "Three cheers for the Sportsman's Club one and all!"

When the cheer had been given, the boys dismounted to examine their prizes. The one they had cut out of the tree the night before was an immense animal for one of its species, and his teeth and claws were frightful to see. The other, although not nearly as large, was still an ugly-looking fellow, and, no doubt, before he received their bullets and buckshot in his head, would have whipped them all in a fair fight, if he had seen fit to descend from his tree and give them battle.

"Now, the next thing to be done," said Eugene, "is to go to the house for a wagon."

"One of us can do that," replied Walter, "and the rest had better stay here and watch the game."

"Do you think there is any danger of their running away?" asked Perk.

"No; but there may be danger that some one will run away with them if we don't keep our eyes open," returned Walter, who was gazing intently toward the woods. "There are other hunters coming, if my ears do not deceive me."

After listening a moment, the boys all heard the noise that had attracted Walter's attention. It was the baying of hounds. The sound came faintly to their ears at first, but grew louder and louder every moment, indicating that the chase was tending toward the corn-field.

"Now isn't that provoking?" cried Eugene. "Pull off your coats, boys, and get ready for a fight; for if we don't have one in less than ten minutes, I shall miss my guess."

"We can tell more about that when we see the hunters," said Featherweight.

"O, I know who they are," replied Eugene. "I have heard those hounds before, and I am

certain that they belong to Bayard Bell and his crowd."

The other members of the Club thought so too, and they wished that Bayard had stayed away half an hour longer, and given them time to remove their game to a place of safety.

Every section has some laws of its own that are not written in books; and this is especially true of a new country, concerning the sharing of the proceeds of a hunt. For example, a hunter sets out on the trail of a deer that has travelled all night. A second hunter strikes the trail in advance of him, and follows up the game and kills it. The first man, if he comes up before the game is removed, and can prove that he was on the trail at an earlier hour than his rival, can claim half the deer, although he may have been miles away when it was killed. Game was so abundant at the time of which we write, that there was seldom any difficulty in regard to the division of the spoils. If the successful hunter was generous, the other let him off very easily, perhaps taking only a few steaks for his next morning's breakfast; but if he showed a disposition to be stingy, his rival always insisted on his rights, and got them, too. In this case the

Club thought they saw a chance for trouble. Every one in that region knew that there was a standing reward of twenty-five dollars offered for the scalp of every panther killed in the parish, and they were afraid that the hunters who were then approaching might endeavor to establish a claim to a portion of the money. That was something they did not intend to allow. They found the trail first, followed up the panther, and finding him in company with another, killed them both, before any one, except Mr. Gaylord, knew that they were in the neighborhood. They hurriedly discussed the matter while they were awaiting the approach of the rival hunters, and resolved that they would stand up for their rights.

The noise of the chase continued to grow louder every moment, and presently a pack of hounds, perhaps a dozen of them in all, emerged from the woods, and leaping the fence came close upon the young hunters before they discovered them. Then they ceased their baying, smelt of the panthers, and tried to scrape an acquaintance with Rex and the rest of the Club's hounds; but their advances not being very graciously received, they ran back to the fence to await the arrival of their masters.

They came at length, and when the foremost horseman appeared in sight, our heroes exchanged significant glances and drew a little closer together, while Eugene rested his gun against the nearest tree and began to pull off his overcoat. "It is just as I expected," said he, in great disgust. "We'll see fun now, for Bayard and his crowd are mean enough for anything."

As Eugene spoke, a magnificent coal-black charger arose in the air, and, sailing over the fence like a bird, came toward the thicket at a rapid gallop. He carried on his back a dark sullen-looking boy about seventeen years of age, who wore a military cloak and cap, heavy horseman's boots and gauntlet gloves, and carried a light rifle slung over his shoulder by a broad strap. This was Bayard Bell, Walter's rival in everything except his studies. Close behind him came four other boys—Will and Seth Bell, Henry Chase and Leonard Wilson—all finely mounted, neatly dressed, and armed with shot-guns and rifles. These five boys had a society of their own, something like the Sportman's Club, and somehow they were always opposing the members of the Club, and were invariably worsted by them. They had claimed to

be the champion oarsmen of the Academy, and in the attempt to establish that claim, had been so badly beaten that their friends were ashamed of them. Bayard and Henry Chase had been candidates for the position of Commodore and Vice-Commodore of the Academy squadron; but Walter and Featherweight had carried off the honors. Bayard also wanted to be president of one of the literary societies of the institution, and had worked hard for certain academic honors that he thought he ought to have; but rattle-brained Eugene Gaylord had snatched one of the prizes from his grasp, and the studious little Featherweight had walked off with the other. As Bayard and his friends had been confident of success in every one of these instances, their failures were sore disappointments to them. They looked upon their defeats as direct insults, and declared that they would never forget them. They had generally tried to treat the Club with civility as long as they remained at the Academy, but now that they were out from under the eyes of their professors and away from the rest of the students, they thought they had no reason to conceal the real state of their feelings.

The attention of the new-comers was so fully

occupied in guiding their horses through the thicket and over the rough, uneven ground, that they did not discover the members of the Club until they had dashed into the very midst of them; and then they checked their horses so suddenly that every one of them was thrown back upon his haunches. The encounter was plainly unexpected, and very much of a surprise to them. They gazed first at our heroes and then at the panthers, and taking in the position of affairs at a glance, looked inquiringly at one another, as if to ask: "What shall we do about it?" Bayard must have been able to read the thoughts that were passing in the minds of his friends, or else he received some sign from them indicative of their desires, for he immediately assumed a swaggering, bullying air, which told the Club plainly enough what was coming.

"Well," he snarled (he always talked in a snappish sort of way, as if he were angry about something), "Who's work is this? Who killed these panthers?"

"We did," replied Eugene.

"You!" echoed Bayard. He looked at the young hunters in amazement, and then smiled derisively. "You can't crowd any such story as

that down our throats," said he, at length. "Your father and your uncle Dick killed them, and you're watching them while they go after a wagon to haul them home. That's the way the thing stands."

"You are nice-looking fellows to kill two panthers, are you not?" said Seth, with a sneer. "You would run crying home to your mammas if you saw the track of one."

"Have it your own way," replied Walter, good-naturedly. "We killed them without help from anybody, but there's no law that I know of that compels you to believe it."

"They're done for, anyhow," said Bayard, "and we are saved considerable trouble and hard riding. We've been following them for more than an hour —we found their trail down there on the banks of the bayou—and we would have got them if we'd had to follow them clear to New York. If you can prove that you shot them you will take a few dollars out of our pockets."

Bayard and his men dismounted and proceeded to examine the animals very closely. They looked at their teeth, lifted their paws, guessed at their weight, and finally Bayard drew a hunting-knife from his boot, and after trying the edge on his

thumb, walked up to one of the panthers and took hold of his ear.

"Hold on, there!" exclaimed Eugene. "What are you about?"

"What am I about?" repeated Bayard, as though he regarded the question as a very strange one; "I am going to take this animal's scalp—that's all. It is worth twenty-five dollars to us. We don't care for the money, but we have rights here, and we intend to enforce them. You can take the other scalp—it belongs to you, or to whoever killed the panthers—and, as we are not disposed to be mean, we will give you both the skins."

"Now, let me tell you something," said Perk. "Keep away from there."

"Eh!" ejaculated Bayard, opening his eyes to their widest extent. "Doesn't half the fifty dollars these scalps are worth belong to us? It does, and we're going to have it."

Perk very deliberately pulled off his overcoat and threw it across his saddle, and Bayard put up his knife and stepped back. Perk coolly seated himself on the head of the largest panther, crossed his legs over the other, and placed his hat beside him

on the ground. When the Club witnessed these movements, they told themselves that if they had belonged to Bayard's party, knowing their friend as well as they did, the offer of double the value of the panthers' scalps would not have induced them to interfere with him then.

CHAPTER IV.

WILD-HOG HUNTING.

"WELL, this beats anything I ever heard of," said Will Bell, angrily. "I shouldn't wonder if we had to fight for our share."

"That would be a bad job for you," said Bab. "Now, Bayard, let me ask you a question: when did you start the trail of these animals?"

"At daylight," was the prompt reply; "and you couldn't have found it any sooner than that, I guess. They were around our house all night, both of them."

"That's a—good morning," said Featherweight.

"It's a truth, and I can prove it," shouted Bayard, glaring savagely at Featherweight. "Get away from there, Phil Perkins."

"Now, Bayard, if you will listen to me a moment I will tell you something," answered Perk. "I won't budge an inch."

Bayard hesitated a moment as if undecided how

to act, and then made a sign to his men, who unslung their guns, and after hanging them upon the horns of their saddles, pulled off their coats and came up around their leader, while the Club moved up to support Perk. A collision seemed imminent, and Walter, who did not believe in fighting, tried to reason with his rival.

"Look here, Bayard," said he; "when you first came up you told us that you had followed the trail of these two panthers for more than an hour, and that you found it on the bank of the bayou."

"So I did, and I'll stick to it."

"And a moment ago you declared that you discovered it at daylight, somewhere near your house."

"Eh!" exclaimed Bayard, who could not help seeing that he had contradicted himself. "I mean —you see—that's the truth, too."

"Your stories don't agree," continued Walter. "The facts of the case are that these two animals did not come together until this morning. The larger one was prowling about our house until midnight, and our dogs treed him. We cut the tree down, but he escaped; and at the first peep of day we put our hounds on his track, and followed him

up and killed him. You struck the trail behind us, and consequently are not entitled to a share of the reward."

This proved to Bayard's satisfaction that the Club understood the matter quite as well as he did. He and his men had been out coon-hunting, most likely (their reputation as hunters did not warrant the supposition that they were in search of larger game), and having stumbled upon the trail of the panthers they had followed it up out of curiosity, and not with any intention of attacking the animals if they had overtaken them. When they found the Club alone with their prizes, they thought it would be a good plan to pay off some of their old scores by robbing them of a portion of their game. They were noted bullies and fighting characters, and they thought the knowledge of this fact would awe the young hunters into submission to any demands they might make upon them; but they had reckoned without their host. Walter saw that what he had said made Bayard and his friends very angry, and he was glad that he was not alone.

"I see just how it is!" exclaimed Seth Bell, in a voice choked with passion. "You have beaten us at so many things that you have got it into your

heads that you can ride over us rough-shod at any time you please; but you will find that you can't do it. We've got things fixed for one of you, if you only knew it, and in less than two days—"

"Hold on, Seth," interrupted Bayard; "you're talking too much. Get away from there, Perkins."

"If it's all the same to you, I'd as soon sit here as anywhere else," was the reply. "If you had any claim we wouldn't say a word. It isn't the twenty-five dollars we care for. If you were in need of it we would give it to you gladly; but you might as well understand, first as last, that you can't bully us out of our rights. If you don't get anything to eat until we surrender one of these scalps to you, you'll be hungry—that's a fact."

This speech was delivered with the utmost good nature, but the Club knew, and so did Bayard and his men, that it was quite useless to argue the matter further. The actions of the latter indicated that they did not intend to waste any more time in words, but had made up their minds to try what virtue there was in their muscles; for they took off their caps, rolled up their sleeves, and made other preparations to attack the Club and drive them from the field. "Come on, fellows," exclaimed

Bayard; "and every time you put in a blow think of that boat-race, and of the election that was carried against us by fraud."

"I really believe there's going to be a skirmish here," said Perk, rising to his feet and drawing himself up to his full height. "Now let me tell you something: I am going to take the two biggest of you and knock your heads together. Pitch in."

Bayard and his men, not in the least intimidated by this threat, took Perk at his word. They set up a yell and sprang forward like a lot of young savages; but before they had made many steps they were suddenly checked by an unlooked-for incident that happened just then. A score of hounds in full cry burst from the woods, and leaping the fence came dashing into the thicket, following the trail of the panthers. A half-dozen horsemen, two of whom were Mr. Gaylord and Uncle Dick, and the rest negroes, followed close at their heels, and at the sight of them the ardor of Bayard and his men cooled directly. They paused in their headlong rush, and, acting with a common impulse, caught up their coats, retreated quickly to their horses, and mounted with all possible haste. When they found themselves safe in their saddles their

courage returned, and while the others contented themselves with shaking their fists at the members of the Club, Seth stopped to say a parting word to them.

"You haven't seen the last of us, my young friends!" he exclaimed, in a very savage tone of voice. "In less than two days one of you will find himself——"

Just then Bayard's heavy glove came across Seth's mouth with a sounding whack, and the latter's horse starting off with the others carried him out of sight, to the great disappointment of the Club, who had listened eagerly to his words, hoping to obtain some clue to the plans Bayard had laid against them. They found out in due time what those plans were, and in a way that one of their number, at least, did not like.

"What's the matter here, boys?" cried Uncle Dick, reining in his horse with a jerk. "You did not come to blows with those—well, I declare!"

Uncle Dick did not finish what he had to say. He glanced down at the game and opened his eyes in amazement, and so did Mr. Gaylord; and for a few seconds neither of them spoke. Eugene, however, was very talkative, and while his father and

uncle were examining the panthers, he entertained them with a glowing description of the manner in which the Club had accomplished their destruction, and told what had passed between them and Bayard.

"I wouldn't have anything to do with those fellows," said Mr. Gaylord, when Eugene had finished his story. "I would keep out of sight and hearing of them as much as I possibly could. They are a hard lot, and as you have been unfortunate enough to incur their enmity, they will seek every opportunity to be revenged upon you. Bob," he added, turning to one of the negroes, "put these animals on your mule, and take them to the house. Come, boys, you have done enough for one day."

The Club mounted their horses, and, accompanied by Mr. Gaylord and Uncle Dick, rode toward the house, the negroes and the hounds bringing up the rear. The panthers were left on the floor of the gin-house, and two of the negroes were instructed how to remove and stretch the skins so that they could be preserved; for Uncle Dick, who was very proud of the exploit the boys had performed, although he had had but little to say about it, declared that they ought to have something to remem-

ber that morning's hunt by, and announced that it was his intention to send the skins to a taxidermist in New Orleans, and have them stuffed and mounted.

After Uncle Dick left the gin-house, the boys stood for a long time holding their horses by the bridle, watching the operation of skinning the panthers, and wondering what they should do next. It was not yet twelve o'clock, and there was a whole afternoon before them to be passed in some way. Eugene, who did not care much what he did so long as he was in motion, suggested that hunting wild-turkeys was fine sport; but as the snow that had fallen the night before had already disappeared, and the chances of tracking turkeys on the bare ground were slim indeed, the Club said they would rather not attempt it. Featherweight reminded them of the 'coon-hunt they had decided upon the night before; but Walter declared that it was not to be thought of. After killing two panthers, and defying Bayard Bell and his crowd of fellows, 'coon-hunting would be very tame sport. They must have something more exciting.

"Well, den, I tells you what you kin do, Marse Walter," said one of the negroes, looking up from

his work; "you 'members dem wild hogs that wasn't druv up last fall kase we couldn't cotch 'em?"

"Yes!" cried the boys in concert.

"I knows right whar they uses,"* continued the negro.

"Now, that's the very idea!" said Perk, excitedly. "There's plenty of sport in wild-hog hunting, and I move that we start out at once. Where shall we go to find the hogs, uncle?"

"You knows whar de ole bee-tree is?" replied the negro. "It's holler, you know. Well, dar dey is—fo' on 'em—mighty big fellers, too, an' savage, kase I seed 'em yesterday when I went out fur to fotch up the mules."

"Let's be off, fellows," repeated Perk, impatiently.

Wouldn't it be better to wait until to-morrow and make a day of it?" asked Walter. "We'll get some of the darkies to help us, and take the cart along to haul the game home in."

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* In the South and West this word is used in the same sense as *frequent*. If a hunter says that wild animals "use" any particular portion of the woods, he means that they are generally to be found there

"But what shall we do this afternoon?" asked Perk. "That's the question now before the house."

"As far as you are individually concerned," replied Bab, "I will promise you that the time shall not hang heavily on your hands. I'll beat you at playing backgammon."

The majority of the Club were in favor of Walter's proposition, and, after some remonstrance from Eugene, who couldn't see how in the world he was going to pass the rest of the day, as he was not much of a backgammon player, and had no new book to read, it was finally adopted. The boys then, suddenly remembering that they had eaten no breakfast and that they were very hungry, put their horses in the stable and walked toward the house. Sam speedily served them up a cold lunch, and at three o'clock they were summoned to dinner, to which they did ample justice.

Bab kept his promise to Perk, and during the whole of the afternoon, and until late at night, made things exceedingly lively for that young gentleman, beating him at every game of backgammon. Walter and Featherweight passed the time with reading and studying; and Eugene, after he had

made all the necessary preparations for the hog-hunt on the morrow, went up to the "cabin," as Uncle Dick's room was always called, and, finding the old sailor absent, took possession of his sofa and went to sleep.

There were no panthers to prowl about and disturb their rest that night, and the young hunters did not know that anything unusual happened on the plantation. But, for all that, something unusual *did* happen, and if the boys had witnessed it, they would have been much more excited and alarmed than they had been at any time during the day or previous night. About eight o'clock two horsemen, one wearing a cloak and riding a white horse, and the other wearing an overcoat and mounted on a bay horse, galloped down the road and drew rein in front of the gate which opened into the carriage-way leading to Mr. Gaylord's dwelling. There they stopped and held a long and earnest consultation, after which they opened the gate and were on the point of riding toward the house, when two men suddenly sprang from the thick bushes that grew on each side of the carriage-way, and while one caught the bridle of the white horse and held fast to it, the other seized his rider and pulled him to the ground.

A few gruff words were addressed to the other horseman, who sat motionless in his saddle for a moment, then faced about and tore down the road as if all the wolves in the parish were close at his heels, followed by the white horse, which was riderless; and before the sound of their hoofs had died away, the men had disappeared as quickly as they had come, taking their prisoner with them, and the carriage-way was once more silent and deserted.

The Club, little dreaming that such a proceeding as this had taken place almost within sight of their window, slept soundly all night, and bright and early the next morning might have been seen with their overcoats, comforters and gloves on, walking up and down the back porch of the house, waiting for their horses to be brought out. In front of the door stood a light two-wheeled cart, which, besides two large baskets of eatables, contained the four negroes who were to assist the boys in securing the wild hogs—three of them curled up among the straw on the bottom of the vehicle, and the other sitting on the driver's seat holding the reins over a very old and infirm pony, which stood with his head down and his eyes closed, as if fast asleep. Gathered about the foot of the steps that led to

the porch were the hounds, some lying down, others walking restlessly about, and all of them showing by unmistakable signs that they were impatient at the delay. Conspicuous among them stood Rex, who was the Club's main dependence that day—as indeed he was every day—the other hounds not being considered of much service in wild-hog hunting.

"Cuff," said Eugene, addressing himself to the driver of the cart, "you might as well go ahead, and when you pass the stables hurry up those horses. We're tired of waiting for them. Let's sing something, fellows."

Perk, Bab and Featherweight pulled their mufflers down from their faces and moved up closer to Eugene, who coughed once or twice and sang in a clear soprano voice:—

"A southerly wind and a cloudy sky
  Proclaim it a hunting morning;
Before the sun rises away we'll fly,
  Dull sleep and a downy bed scorning.
To horse, my brave boys, and away!
  Bright Phœbus the hills is adorning;
The face of all nature looks gay;
  'Tis a beautiful scent-laying morning.
Hark! hark! forward!
Tan-ta-ra! tan-ta-ra! tan-ta-ra!"

The song was not exactly appropriate to the occasion. The sky was not cloudy, but perfectly clear; and instead of a "southerly wind" there was a keen north wind blowing, which was so searching that the boys were glad to pull their comforters up around their faces again as soon as the song was finished, and walked up and down the porch beating their hands together to keep them warm. But, for all that, it was well sung and worth listening to; for these four boys understood music and delighted in it. Eugene was a good soprano, Featherweight carried the alto, Bab sang a fine tenor, and Perk's bass was something better than common. Walter was the only one of the Club who had no music in his soul. He generally joined in the singing, and always made a discord; but on this particular morning he held his peace, having something else to think about. He had drawn back into the doorway to get out of the wind, and stood with one hand in his pocket, and the other holding a newspaper, at which his right eye, which was the only part of his face that could be seen over his muffler, was looking intently. When the song was finished he uttered an exclamation, and without stopping to explain read as follows:—

"*Lafitte Redivivus.*—A gang of desperate smugglers have taken up their abode among the dark bayous and pestilent swamps of that portion of Louisiana bordering on the Gulf coast. They are composed of Chinamen, Malays, Portuguese and Creoles, and are led by two Americans. The New Orleans Collector of Customs expects soon to accomplish their detection, although he has thus far been unable to gain the slightest clue to their haunts, or to the manner in which their nefarious trade is carried on."

"What do you think of that?" asked Walter, turning toward his companions to observe the effect the reading of this article would have upon them. He expected them to be astonished, and their actions indicated that they certainly were.

"I'll tell you what I think about it," said Perk, who was the first to speak. "I don't doubt the existence of such a band, for some of the settlers have suspected it for a long time, and the presence of the revenue cutters along the coast shows that the government suspects it also; and I think that if we had got into a fight with those boys yesterday, we would have whipped three of the relatives of the ringleader of this organization."

The arrival of the horses at this moment put a stop to the conversation; but when the young hunters had mounted and ridden into the lane that ran across the cornfield toward the swamp, it was re-

sumed, and the matter discussed most thoroughly. But at the end of an hour, after each boy had expressed an opinion and brought forward his arguments to establish it, they knew no more about the smugglers than they did when they began the debate. Their horses, however, had made better use of their time, for while the discussion was in progress they had accomplished the four miles that lay between the house and the swamp, and brought their riders within a short distance of the old bee-tree. There the Club dismounted to await the arrival of the cart and the negroes, and to decide upon the plan of the hunt. They dropped the smugglers now, and talked about nothing but wild hogs.

At the time of which we write farming was carried on on an extensive scale at the South. Mr. Gaylord had more than three thousand acres under cultivation. He owned two hundred working mules and horses, double that number of young cattle which ran loose in the swamp, and two thousand hogs. These hogs were not managed as Northern farmers manage theirs. They were allowed to roam at will in the woods from one year's end to another's —all except those he intended to fatten, which were penned up during the latter part of the autumn and

fed until just before the holidays, when they were slaughtered. Those that were permitted to run at large fared sumptuously on beech-nuts, acorns, and hickory-nuts. Mr. Gaylord's neighbors all owned immense droves, which also ran loose in the swamp, and, of course, it was necessary to have some way of distinguishing them, so that each planter would know his property when he saw it; consequently the hogs were all marked—that is, their ears were cut in different ways. Mr. Gaylord marked his by cutting the left ear entirely off; so whenever he found a one-eared hog in the woods, he was pretty certain that it belonged to him.

Catching these hogs was as much of a jubilee with Southern boys as a corn-husking is with you fellows who live in the North. A planter set a certain day for the business, and needing all the help he could get, sent invitations to his neighbors, who responded by coming themselves and bringing some of their negroes. The most of the hogs, being tame and gentle, could be driven anywhere, and before night they would be confined in pens previously made for their reception; but there were always some wild ones among them that would take

to their heels and seek refuge in the deepest parts of the swamp. Then came the fun. These hogs must be secured, and that could be done only by catching them with dogs and tying them—an undertaking in which there was plenty of excitement, but which was sometimes attended with considerable danger, as you will presently see. The hogs of which Walter and his friends were now in pursuit, had escaped from Mr. Gaylord's drove during the previous autumn, and had remained at large in spite of all the efforts made to capture them.

In a few minutes the cart came up, and after a short consultation with the driver the plan of the attack was decided upon. The pony was tied to a sapling, the boys and negroes formed themselves into a line, and, after sending the dogs on in advance, began to move toward the old bee-tree, gradually lengthening the line as they approached it, in order to surround the game. The dogs did not give tongue and run about among the bushes, as they usually did, but, led by Rex, walked straight ahead, as if they understood the matter in hand as well as their masters did, and moved so slowly that the boys easily kept them in sight. They had gone perhaps half a mile in this order,

when the hounds suddenly uttered a simultaneous yelp, which was followed by a loud grunt and a violent commotion in the bushes directly in advance of them. The game was started, and now the hunt began in earnest.

CHAPTER V.

PERK IN A PREDICAMENT.

THERE are times when nothing in the world does one so much good as giving vent to half a dozen terrific yells in quick succession, and we have always thought that the occasion of a hog hunt is one of them. When the sport first begins, and you hear the game, which is to you invisible, crashing through the bushes on all sides of you; when you see your eager dogs flying over the ground like "coursers in the race" (we never could understand how any healthy boy can live without at least one good dog); when your horse, hearing the sounds of the chase, pricks up his ears and fairly trembles under the saddle with impatience; when you feel your muscles growing rigid, and your heart swelling within you with excitement;—in circumstances like these, is there anything that lets off the surplus steam so easily and completely as a few good yells given with your

whole soul? It is one of the very best things in the world for the health—at least the Club thought so; and if you could have heard the yells they gave on that particular morning, you would have said that they were blessed with extraordinary lungs.

In less time than it takes to tell it, after the hounds gave them notice that the game had been discovered, the young hunters had scattered in all directions, and Walter found himself being carried through the bushes with a rapidity that endangered not only his clothing but his skin, also. His white charger, Tom, had engaged in wild-hog hunting so often that he well understood his business, which was to follow Rex wherever he went, and keep as close to his heels as possible; and Walter had nothing to do but to lie flat along his neck, to avoid being swept out of the saddle by the branches of the trees, shut his eyes and hold on like grim death. This was not the most comfortable position in the world, for the horse, which entered into the sport with as much eagerness as though he possessed the soul to appreciate it, was not at all careful in picking his way. He went like the wind, dodging around this stump, jumping over that, plunging through thickets of briers and cane that seemed

almost impassable, and finally, without any word from his rider, suddenly stopped.

Walter looked up and found himself in a clear space about ten feet in diameter, in which the bushes had been beaten down and trampled upon until they presented the appearance of having been cut with a scythe. Near the middle of this clear spot stood the faithful Rex, holding by the ear the largest wild hog it was ever Walter's fortune to put eyes on. His attention was first attracted by a wound on the greyhound's shoulder, from which the blood was flowing profusely, and then his eyes wandered to the enormous tusks that had made that wound.

These tusks are two teeth in the lower jaw, one on each side, sometimes represented as growing above the snout, as you see them in the pictures in your geography and natural history. You may have regarded these pictures as exaggerations, but if you could have seen the hog Rex caught that morning you would have had reason to think differently. His tusks were five inches in length. These teeth are not used in chewing the food, but in fighting; and they are dangerous weapons. A wild hog does not bite his enemy, as one might sup-

pose; but strikes and wounds him with his tusks; and wherever they touch they cut like a knife.

A wild hog is the wildest thing that ever lived, not even excepting a deer or turkey. He inhabits the darkest nooks in the woods, and, like some other wild animals, feeds at night and sleeps in the day time. He has one peculiarity: no matter how tight a place he gets into or how badly he is hurt, he never squeals. More than that, a dog which has often hunted wild hogs seems to fall into their habits, for during the hunt he seldom growls or barks.

Walter was highly enraged when he found that Rex was wounded, and told himself that if he had had his double-barrel in his hands he would have put an end to that hog's existence then and there. But he was entirely unarmed, and not possessing the courage to attack such a monster with empty hands, he sat quietly in his saddle and watched the contest. He had seen Rex in many a battle before that, and he saw him in some desperate scrapes afterward, but he never knew him to fight with greater determination than he exhibited that morning. Have you ever seen an ant carrying off a grain of corn? If you have, you will gain some

idea of the great odds Rex had to contend with when we tell you that there was as much difference in size between him and the hog, as between the ant and the kernel of corn. He looked altogether too small to engage so large an enemy; but his wound had enraged him, and when he once got his blood up, he feared nothing.

The hog was no coward, either. He had evidently made up his mind to win the battle, and his movements were much more rapid than you would suppose so large a mountain of flesh capable of. He struck at Rex repeatedly, and tried hard to bring him within reach of those terrible tusks, one fair blow from which would have ended the battle in an instant and left Walter to sing:

"No dog to love, none to caress."

But Rex understood all that quite as well as his master did. He sustained his high reputation even in that emergency, holding fast to the hog's ear, keeping out of reach of the deadly teeth, and now and then giving his antagonist a shake that brought him to his knees. It was genuine science against Kentucky science—main strength and awkwardness. Neither of the combatants uttered a sound;

both fought in silence and with the energy of desperation.

Walter had watched the contest perhaps two or three minutes, not yet having made up his mind what he ought to do, when he heard a crashing in the bushes on the opposite side of the clearing, and presently a large iron-gray horse appeared and stopped as his own had done. On his back he bore an object that was almost covered up by a broad-brimmed planter's hat; and the removal of that hat revealed the flushed face and black head of Phil Perkins. He gazed about him for a moment with a bewildered air, and when his eyes rested on the greyhound and his huge antagonist, he straightened up and prepared for action. His first move was to throw back his head and give utterance to a yell that would have done credit to a Choctaw brave in his war-paint, and his second to spring off his horse and run to the hound's assistance. He stopped for a moment to push back his sleeves and settle his hat firmly on his head, and before Walter could tell what he was going to do, he caught the hog by his hind legs and with one vigorous twist lifted him from the ground and threw him on his side. Holding him down with one hand, he fum-

bled in his pockets with the other, and finally drew out a piece of rope, with which he proceeded to confine the hog's feet.

Now, Perkins was quite as famous for his reckless courage as for his strength, and when he appeared on the scene Walter knew that something was going to happen to that hog; but he little thought his friend would attack him with empty hands. "Perk!" he exclaimed, in great alarm, "get away from there. Don't you know you are in danger?"

"No, I reckon not," was Perk's reply. "If I can't manage any hog that ever ran wild in Louisiana, when once I get a good hold of him, I will make you a present of my horse."

"But, Perk, you've got hold of a varmint now. That fellow is as big as two common hogs."

"No difference if he is as big as four. I am man enough for him."

At this moment, just as Walter was about to dismount to go to Perk's assistance, Cuff, one of the negroes, hurried up breathless and excited. "Marse Walter!" he exclaimed, "I'se mighty glad I'se found you. Marse 'Gene say come dar right away. We got one cotched, but we needs help mighty bad."

Thinking that his brother might be in trouble (Walter told himself that that boy could not be easy unless he was in some sort of difficulty), and not doubting that Perk, with the greyhound's help, would be able to manage his captive, Walter put spurs to his horse and followed Cuff, who led the way to a ravine about a quarter of a mile distant, and there he found the mate to the hog Rex had caught. He was almost as large, quite as furious, and as fully determined to have things all his own way. Eugene had thrown a rope around one of his hind legs and fastened it to the nearest tree. He was assisted by Bab, the four negroes, and six hounds; but the hog seemed in a fair way to whip them all.

These hounds were unlike Rex in more respects than one. Not possessing one quarter of his courage, they were out of place in a rough-and-tumble fight—they could not be depended upon. When Eugene shouted to them they would catch the hog and pull him to the ground, and the negroes would run up to throw their ropes over his head and around his legs; but he fought so desperately that the hounds would let go their hold, and then there would be a scattering that would have been amu-

sing had the struggle been unattended with danger. The hog seemed to care nothing for the dogs. He tried hard to reach his human enemies, and the only thing that protected them from his fury was the rope—a piece of clothes-line—with which he was tied to the tree. But even that would not long avail them, for, to Walter's intense horror, he saw that some of the strands had parted.

"Eugene! Bab!" he cried, in a voice which he could scarcely raise above a whisper, "that rope is breaking. Run for your lives!"

The words were scarcely spoken when the hog made a savage lunge at Eugene, who happened to be nearest him, and the rope, no longer strong enough to sustain his weight, parted with a loud snap. Eugene's face grew as pale as death. He stood for an instant as if paralyzed, and then turned and took to his heels, but before he had made a half dozen steps a root caught his foot, and he fell heavily to the ground.

A cry of horror burst from all who witnessed the peril of the unlucky young hunter, and Bab stood motionless, while Walter sat in his saddle looking fixedly at his brother without possessing the power to move hand or foot. There was but one thing he

could do, and that was to encourage the hounds to catch the hog. That might delay him until Eugene could reach his horse, and then he would be safe. As soon as he had recovered the use of his tongue he set up a shout, and the dogs being well trained and accustomed to obedience, seized the hog and pulled him to the ground.

"Now, then, run in and catch him—all of us," cried Walter, throwing himself from his saddle. "Be in a hurry, and if you once get a good hold of him, hang on with all the strength you've got."

But before Bab or any of the negroes had time to move, the hog scrambled to his feet, and shaking off the dogs as easily as a giant would shake off so many school-boys, again started after Eugene. So quickly had all this been done that his intended victim had not yet arisen from the ground, and before he could think twice the hog charged upon him like a runaway locomotive. O! if Rex had only been there, or if Walter had had his trusty double-barrel in his hands!

The only weapon he could find was a short club which happened to be lying near him on the ground, which, even had he been within striking distance of the hog, would no more have checked

him in his headlong rush than a straw would stem the current of Niagara; still he caught it up and sprang forward, determined to save his brother or share in his peril, when, just in the nick of time—not one single instant too soon—help arrived, and from a source from which he least expected it. He heard a yell of delight from Bab, a gray streak flashed before his eyes, and just as Eugene put up his arm to ward off the blow from those terrible tusks, which were now almost within an inch of his face, the hog was jerked backward and thrown struggling on the ground. It was out of his power to hurt anybody then, for Rex the infallible had him.

"Hurrah!" shouted Eugene, jumping to his feet, "he's our hog now. Shake him up a little, old fellow, to pay him for the scare he gave me."

Rex did shake him up, not only a little but a great deal; and in five minutes more the hog was secured, his feet having been fastened together so that he could not get up, and his mouth tied with ropes to prevent him from using his teeth. But even then Walter could not help trembling. What would have become of his brother if Rex had been one minute later? His timely arrival had saved

Eugene from death, or at least from horrible mutilation, and do you wonder that he threw his arms around that greyhound's neck and actually hugged him? Eugene did not seem to mind it in the least. With him the danger being out of sight, was out of mind. The fight was over; he had come out of it without serious injury; and if there had been another wild hog about he would have been the first to start after it.

"I am all right, Walter, don't look so sober," said he, rolling up his sleeve to examine his arm, which had been pretty severely bruised by his fall. "Now, then, where are Perk and Featherweight?"

"I haven't seen Featherweight," replied Walter, "but I left Perk and Rex attending to the mate of this hog. We'll go and meet him. Bring up the cart, Cuff, and take care of the game."

The three hunters mounted their horses and rode back to find Perk. As they were considerably wearied by their recent exertions, they allowed their horses to walk leisurely along, and they were probably a quarter of an hour in reaching the spot where Walter had first discovered Rex and his huge antagonist. They saw no signs of Perk, and neither did they hear anything of him; and they concluded

that he had tied his hog and sat down to wait for them. They soon learned, however, that their friend was not taking matters quite so easily as they had imagined, and that there were things in the world against which even Perk, with all his strength, activity and courage could not prevail; for, when they reached the clearest space in the thicket of briers and cane where Walter had left him, they saw a sight that filled them with amazement and alarm. It was nothing less than a fight between Perk and the hog. The young hunter was holding his antagonist by both hind feet, and the hog was kicking and struggling and trying hard to get at Perk to strike him. The latter's face was white with terror, the perspiration was streaming from his forehead, and the boys saw that it was with the greatest difficulty that he could retain his hold. He looked up when he heard them approaching, but was too exhausted to speak.

Walter and his companions, comprehending the state of affairs at a glance, threw themselves from their horses and hurried to Perk's assistance; but knowing that if he could not manage the hog they had no business with him, they shouted lustily for Rex. The faithful animal was always on hand

PERK IN A PREDICAMENT.

when he was wanted, and before they had spoken his name the second time he came dashing through the bushes and seized the hog, just as Perk, completely exhausted, released his hold and sank to the ground. The hog fought desperately with his new enemies, but Rex was more than a match for him, and in a few minutes the boys had him securely bound. After that they tied up his mouth, and then turned their attention to Perk, who lay where he had fallen, panting loudly and utterly unable to move or speak. They carried him out of the thicket and laid him upon their overcoats, which they spread at the foot of a tree, and while Walter supported his head and Bab fanned him with his hat, Eugene ran to the bayou and presently returned with a cup of water.

"I'm clean done out," panted Perk, when he had drained the cup. "Now, listen to me a moment and I'll tell you something; that was the hardest fight I ever had. Just look at that," he added, extending his hands, which were so badly cramped that he could not open them.

It was fully half an hour before Perk's face resumed its natural color, and then he told his companions how he had got into the predicament

in which they found him. As he had a somewhat round-about way of getting at it, we will tell the story in our own words; and in order that you may fully understand it, we must give you a little insight into Rex's character.

The greyhound had but two faults in the world: He was a constitutional thief, and he always kept as close to Walter as he could. He was master of all the hounds on the plantation, and if he caught any of them in the act of appropriating articles that did not belong to them, he did not hesitate to thrash them soundly; and yet, at the same time, he stole more than all the other dogs put together. He would sneak into the kitchen when he thought no one was observing his movements, and purloin any eatables that happened to be within his reach; and as for hens' nests, the Club used to say that he would have nosed out one on top of the house, and conjured up some plan to rob it. Walter tried every way he could think of to make an honest dog of him, and to induce him to abandon this bad habit. He fed him until he refused to eat any more, thinking that he would certainly have no inclination to steal for at least an hour or two; but in less than ten minutes he would hear a rumpus in

the kitchen, and see Rex retreating toward the barn followed by a shower of stove-wood. The habit could not be broken up—it was constitutional.

The other habit was almost as annoying on some occasions as the first. Rex kept close at his master's side night and day. He would sleep in his room if he left his door open, and if he did not, Rex would jump up on the wood-shed, thence on to the kitchen, from which he could easily reach the upper porch, that ran entirely around the main building, and so go in at the window. It made no difference to him whether the window was open or not, for he had been known to jump through the sash. He was regular in his attendance at church, and whenever Walter went visiting, Rex always went too. He seemed to take it for granted that he was welcome wherever his master was, and if any one thought differently, and attempted to drive him out of the house, he would stand his ground, and show his teeth in the most threatening manner. As it was well known throughout the settlement that Rex always used those teeth on anything that he got angry at, he was generally allowed to have his own way.

It was this habit that had saved Eugene's life,

and placed Perk in his dangerous predicament. While Walter remained with him, Rex clung to the game manfully; but when he went away to assist Eugene, Rex went too, leaving Perk to manage the hog as best he could. The latter, having great confidence in his endurance and power of muscle, did not at first feel at all uneasy; but it was not long before he discovered that a hog, weighing three hundred and fifty pounds, was an ugly customer to handle. He held the animal by his hind legs, which he had lifted from the ground, and it required the outlay of every particle of strength he possessed to retain his hold. He could not manage the hog with one hand, and, of course, while both his hands were employed he could not tie him.

Bear in mind, now, that this was no tame hog, that would have run away if Perk had released him. He was wild, savage and angry; and if he could have reached his enemy the career of one of the Sportsman's Club would have been brought to a sudden close. The hog would have attacked him at once, and Perk would have been easily overcome.

The young hunter became alarmed when he saw what a scrape he had got into, and began shouting

for help; but the rest of the Club were too far away to hear him, and finding that he was wasting his breath to no purpose, he did the only thing he could do—he held fast to save his life. Walter was gone fully three-quarters of an hour, and during all this time Perk clung to that savage beast, afraid to let go, and almost unable to hold on. His companions arrived just in time to save him; a moment more would have sealed his fate. Perk had a high opinion of a hog's strength and endurance now, and wound up his story by declaring that he would a heap sooner face a bear.

"I believe I own more property now than I did this morning," said Walter, when Perk ceased speaking. "I think I heard you say that if you couldn't tie any hog that ever ran wild in Lousiana, you would make me a present of your horse. I consider the animal mine, but you may use him until you can provide yourself with another. Can any one tell what has become of Featherweight?"

No one could. Eugene said that when the hounds first discovered the wild hogs, he and the missing member were riding side by side; and that the last time he saw Featherweight he was galloping through the bushes at the top of his speed. Every

one wondered what had become of him. There was plenty of room in the swamp for him to get lost, but still it was not likely that such a misfortune had befallen him, for Featherweight had hunted over the ground so often that he knew it like a book. Bab suggested that it would be a good plan for some one to sound a horn, and Eugene did so; but no response came. Again and again the horn was blown, and finally they heard an answer, but it was not such as they expected. It was the shrill neigh of a horse which rang through the swamps at short intervals, and came nearer and nearer every moment. The Club began to look at one another rather anxiously; and when at last a riderless pony—Featherweight's pony—burst from the bushes and galloped up to the place where their own horses were standing, the boys were really alarmed. Something had certainly happened to their friend; but whether he had been thrown from his horse or had met with some more serious trouble, they had no means of judging.

"We must start in search of him at once," said Walter. "Cuff," he added, addressing himself to the negro who at that moment drove up with the cart in which lay the two wild hogs, securely

bound; "tie that horse behind your wagon, take him to the house with you, and tell father that Fred Craven is missing, and that we are looking for him. If we are not at home before dark he will know what detains us."

The boys did *not* reach home before dark. It was long after midnight when they entered their room and sat down before the fire to dry their clothes, which were covered with mud; and they did not bring Featherweight with them, and neither had he come home during their absence. Bright and early the next morning they renewed their search, accompanied by Mr. Gaylord, Uncle Dick, and some of the negroes. As they were riding through the quarters they met the old servant whose duty it was to feed and take care of the hounds, and he told them that Featherweight's dog had come home during the night all cut to pieces, and so weak from loss of blood that he could scarcely stand. He declared that the mischief had been done by a wild hog, and expressed the fear that Featherweight might have been injured also. The boys were greatly terrified by this piece of news. They went to the kennels to look at the hound, which had been wrapped up in blankets and

tended as carefully as though he were a human being, and then set out for the woods.

They rode all that day, and not only did they fail to find Featherweight, but they did not see anybody until about three o'clock in the afternoon. Then Walter and Perk, who had separated from the others, came suddenly upon some one they did not expect to see. It was Wilson, but at first they did not know him. His hands and face were as black as a negro's, his clothing was torn and covered with soot, and, taken altogether, he was the worst-looking boy they had ever seen. They saw at a glance that he had been in close quarters somewhere.

CHAPTER VI.

BAYARD'S PLANS.

AN angrier boy than Bayard Bell was, when he leaped his horse over the fence and rode away from the thicket, which had so nearly been the scene of a desperate conflict between his followers and the members of the Sportsman's Club, was never seen anywhere. He told himself over and over again that Walter Gaylord had insulted him (although how he had done so, it would have puzzled a sensible boy to determine), and declared that he had done it for the last time, and that he had put up with his meanness just as long as he could. Although Perk had said, almost in so many words, that he was willing and even eager to fight, and Bab, Eugene and Featherweight had shown by their actions that they were ready to stand by their friend to the last, Bayard did not waste a thought upon them, but laid all the blame upon Walter, who had conducted himself like a young gentleman

during the whole interview, and kept himself in the back-ground as much as possible. The reason for this was, that Bayard had long ago learned to hate Walter most cordially; and the cause of this hatred was the latter's popularity among the students at the Academy. Bayard, like many a boy of our acquaintance, desired to be first in everything. He wanted the students to look up to him and treat him with respect, and yet he was not willing to make any exertions to bring about this state of affairs. Besides being stingy and unaccommodating, he showed his tyrannical disposition at every opportunity, and then wondered why he had so few friends. Walter, on the other hand, was modest and unassuming, never tried to push himself forward, was always polite to his companions, and would put himself to any amount of trouble to do a favor for one of them. The result was that, with the exception of a few congenial spirits whom Bayard had gathered about him, the boys all liked him, and showed it by every means in their power. The more Bayard thought of it the angrier he became.

"They're conceited upstarts, the whole lot of them," said he, turning around in his saddle to face

his companions, who were galloping along behind him. "It's lucky for them that Mr. Gaylord and those niggers came up just as they did, for I was going to punch some of them."

"Perhaps it is fortunate for us that the fight didn't come off," said Leonard Wilson, who, if he had no other qualities, was at least honest. "Did you hear what Perkins said about knocking our heads together?"

"O, he wouldn't have done it," said Will Bell, with a sneer; "he couldn't. He's a regular milksop, and so are they all."

"Well, if they are, I don't know it," said Wilson.

"No, nor nobody else," chimed in Henry Chase. "That Phil Perkins is a perfect lion, and Walter Gaylord isn't a bit behind him. What a lovely muscle Walter showed on the day we pulled that boat-race! Why, it was as large as the boxing-master's. And what long wind he has! And can't he pick up his feet, though, when he is running the bases?"

Bayard looked sharply at Chase, and made no reply. He had commenced by abusing and threatening the Sportsman's Club, and expected to be

assisted in it by his men; but here was Chase praising his rival up to the skies, and Wilson nodding his head approvingly, as much as to say that he fully agreed with his companion, and that every word he uttered was the truth. Bayard was very much disgusted at this, and showed it by facing about in his saddle, and maintaining a sullen silence for the next quarter of an hour. The deep scowl on his forehead indicated that he was thinking busily, and his thoughts dwelt quite as much upon two of the boys who were galloping along the muddy lane behind him, as they did upon the members of the Sportsman's Club. At last he seemed to have decided upon something, for he straightened up, and began to look about him.

"Fellows," said he, "we are but a short distance from the bayou, and I propose that we ride over there, water our horses, and eat our lunch. I'm hungry."

"So am I," replied Will; "but I'd rather go home. I can't see any fun in sitting down in the mud, and eating cold bread and meat, when there are a comfortable room and a warm dinner awaiting us only three miles away."

Bayard paid no more attention to his cousin's

words than if they had not been spoken at all, but turned his horse out of the lane into the bushes, and rode toward the bayou. His companions hesitated a little, and then followed after him; and in a few minutes more they were sitting on the banks of the stream discussing their sandwiches, and gazing into the water, as if they saw something there that interested them very much. No one spoke, for Bayard was in the sulks, and that threw a gloom over them all.

If Bayard was hungry his actions did not show it, for he ate but a very few mouthfuls of his sandwich, and finally, with an exclamation of impatience, threw it into the water. The movement attracted the attention of his cousins, and that seemed to be just what Bayard wanted, for he began to make some mysterious signs to them, at the same time nodding his head toward the bushes, indicating a desire to say a word to them in private.

Will and Seth must have understood him, for they winked significantly, and went on eating their sandwiches, while Bayard, after yawning and stretching his arms, arose to his feet and walked up the bayou out of sight. As soon as he thought he could do so without exciting suspicion, Will fol-

lowed him; and shortly afterward Seth also disappeared. Wilson and Chase gazed after him curiously, and as soon as the sound of his footsteps had died away, turned and looked at one another. "What's up?" asked the latter.

"That's a question I can't answer," replied Wilson. "They're going to hold a consultation about something."

"Or somebody," observed Chase. "I believe you and I will be the subjects of their deliberations —in fact I know it. Didn't you see how angry Bayard looked over what we said about Walter and his crowd? I know him too well to believe that he will allow that to pass unnoticed. He's up to some trick now, and if we creep through the bushes very carefully we can find out what it is. We'd be playing eavesdropper though, and that would be mean, wouldn't it?"

"I don't see that it would. When one knows that a fellow like Bayard Bell, who is bad enough for anything, is laying plans against him, he has a perfect right to resort to any measures to find out what those plans are. Come on; I'll go if you will."

Chase, needing no second invitation, arose to his

feet and stole up the bayou in the direction Bayard and his friends had gone, closely followed by Wilson. They moved very cautiously, and presently arrived within hearing of the voices of the three conspirators, for such they believed them to be. A few seconds afterward they came within sight of them, and found them seated in a little thicket which grew on the bank of the bayou, engaged in an earnest conversation. So deeply interested were they in what they were saying that they thought of nothing else, and the two eavesdroppers approached within twenty yards of them, and took up a position from which they could observe their movements and hear every word that was said. Bayard was talking rapidly, and the others were listening with an expression of intense astonishment on their faces; and Chase and Wilson had not been long in their concealment before they began to be astonished too.

"Everything I tell you is the truth," said Bayard, emphatically. "There is scarcely a person in the settlement who does not know that there is such an organization in existence; but I do not suppose there is any one outside of the band who knows who the members are except myself. I know three

of them, and I found them out by accident. They are the ones who must do this work for us."

"Must!" repeated Seth.

"Yes, they *must*, whether they are willing or not."

"Have you spoken to them about it?"

"No, I have not had a chance."

"Why, you said you had got matters all arranged!" said Will.

"I told you that in less than two days Walter Gaylord would find himself miles and miles at sea, with a fair prospect of never seeing Louisiana again," replied Bayard. "It's lucky I didn't tell you any more, for you, Seth, came near blabbing it on two different occasions. You never could keep anything to yourself."

"I didn't intend to tell them what we are going to do to them," retorted Seth, with some spirit. "I only wanted to give them to understand that we have laid our plans to punish them in some way."

"And so put them on their guard!" snarled Bayard. "That's a pretty way to do business, isn't it? Now, unless you promise faithfully to

keep everything I tell you a profound secret, I won't say another word."

"I promise," said Seth, readily.

"So do I," chimed in Will.

"Well, then, I will tell you how I came to find out about these smugglers," continued Bayard, settling back on his elbow. "It happened last summer, shortly after that boat-race. I felt so mean over our defeat that I wanted to keep away from everybody, and you know that I left the Academy and came home. One day I took my gun and strolled out into the swamp. At noon I found myself about ten miles from home, and on the bank of a little stream which emptied into the bay. I stopped there to rest, and after eating my lunch, stretched myself out on the leaves and was fast going off into a doze, when I was aroused by the sound of oars; and, upon looking up, saw a large yawl just entering the bayou. There were three men in it, and they were Coulte and his two sons."

"Coulte!" exclaimed Will, in amazement. "The old hunter?"

"And his two sons!" echoed Seth. "Are they smugglers?"

"Let me tell my story without interruption, if

you please," said Bayard, impatiently. "You will know as much about it as I do when I am done. I wondered what they could be doing there," he continued, "and raised myself to a sitting posture, intending to speak to them when they came up, and would have done so, had I not noticed that they were very stealthy in their movements, and that they did not pull the boat into the bayou until they had looked up and down the bay, to make sure that there was no one watching them.

"Now, when one man sees another sneaking about, and showing by every action that he is anxious to escape observation, it is natural that he should want to see what he is going to do. I did not suppose that Coulte was up to any mischief, for, like everybody else in the settlement, I believed him to be an honest old fellow; but I knew that he did not want to be seen, and that was enough for me. As quick as thought I slipped behind a tree, whose high, spreading roots afforded me an excellent concealment, and lying flat upon the ground, looked over into the bayou, and watched the three men in the yawl as closely as ever a panther watched his prey. They seemed to be satisfied at last that there was no one in sight, for they pulled

quickly into the bayou and stopped on the opposite shore, directly in front of me. The bank, at that particular place, was about twenty feet in height, and was partially concealed by thick bushes, which grew up out of the water. When the boat stopped Coulte raised his oar and thrust it into the bushes, where it came in contact with something that gave out a hollow sound. He struck three blows, and after waiting a moment struck three more; and presently I heard something that sounded like an answering knock on the other side of the bushes. Coulte replied with two knocks, and I distinctly heard a latch raised and a door opened—although where the door was I do not know—and a voice inquired:

"'How's the wind to-day?"

"'South-south-west,' replied Coulte, in his broken English.

"'How was it last night?'

"'North-north-east.'

"'Where from?' asked the voice.

"'Havana, Galveston, and New Orleans.'

"'Whither bound?'

"'Here, and there, and everywhere.'"

"What did they mean by talking that way?"

asked Seth, who had listened eagerly to his cousin's story, but with an expression on his face which said plainly that he did not believe a word of it. "I can't make any sense out of it."

"Neither could I—neither could anybody," replied Bayard, "not even if he were a member of the organization, because there is no sense in it. But there was *use* in it, for the man on the other side of the bushes knew that Coulte was one of the smugglers by the way he answered the questions; at least I thought he was satisfied of it, for he pulled aside the bushes and showed himself. He shook hands with the men in the yawl, and began a conversation with them. I heard every word that was said, but the only information I gained was, that Coulte's two sons were employed as foremast hands on board the vessel in which the smuggling is carried on. When the conversation was ended, Coulte passed out some bales and boxes he had brought in his yawl, and then got out his oars and pulled down the bayou."

"What do you suppose was on the other side of those bushes?" asked Will, after a long pause.

"I am sure I don't know, unless it was a cave where the smugglers stowed away their goods."

"What's the reason you have never told this before?" inquired Seth. "Why didn't you go straight to your father with the news, and have him put the authorities on the lookout? Don't you know that there is a heavy reward offered for any information that will lead to the breaking up of this band?"

"I do," replied Bayard, leaning toward his cousins and sinking his voice almost to a whisper, "but I don't want the band broken up. I may join it myself sometime."

"You!" cried his auditors, starting back in surprise.

"Yes, I; that is if they will take me; and if they won't, I will blow the whole thing. Here's where I have the advantage of them, and that's the way I am going to induce Coulte to help us carry out our plans against Walter Gaylord. We'll ride over and call on the old fellow this very afternoon, and tell him that we want him and his boys to make a prisoner of Walter at the very first opportunity, take him on board their vessel, carry him to the West Indies, and lose him there so effectually that he will never find his way home again."

As Bayard said this he settled back on his elbow

and looked at his cousins, and Seth and Will, too astonished to speak, settled back on their elbows and looked at him. They had always known that Bayard was cruel and vindictive, but they had never dreamed that he could conceive of a plan like this. How coolly he talked about it, and how confident he seemed of success!

"I flatter myself that this is a grand idea, and one that nobody else in the world would ever have thought of," continued Bayard.

"You're right there," replied Will. "I don't suppose you have thought of the obstacles in your way?"

"You can't mention one that I have not thought of and provided for. Try it."

"Well, in the first place, suppose that Coulte declines to assist you in carrying out your plans? He likes Walter."

"He likes his liberty better. If he refuses I will just say 'law' to him, and that will bring him to terms."

"That's so," said Will, hesitatingly, as if he did not like to yield the point. "In the next place, suppose that Coulte agrees to comply with your demands and captures Walter, and the rest of the

crew (I do not believe that Coulte's two sons comprise the entire company of the smuggling vessel), refuse to take him to the West Indies; what then?"

"No one except Coulte and his sons need know anything about it. They can smuggle Walter on board at night, as if he were a bale of contraband goods, and keep him concealed until the vessel reaches its destination."

"And then he will be set at liberty, and the first thing you know he will come back here a hero, and you and Coulte will find yourselves in hot water," exclaimed Will. "That will be the upshot of the whole matter. I don't like those boys any better than you do, and should be glad to see them brought up with a round turn; but this thing won't work."

"Don't I tell you that one part of my plan is to lose him so that he will never find his way back here?" asked Bayard, angrily. "You are very dull, both of you."

"I am not," said Seth; "I understand it all, and begin to think that it will prove a complete success. I never could have studied up a scheme

like that. It almost takes my breath away to think of it."

"I *know* it will be successful," said Bayard, confidently; "and if you will ride over to Coulte's with me, I will convince you of it in less than a quarter of an hour after we get there."

"What shall we do with Chase and Wilson?" asked Seth. "Are you going to take them into your confidence?"

"Of course not. We must get rid of them immediately; for if they remain with us they will want to accompany us to Coulte's, and that is something we can't allow. We'll raise a quarrel with them. We'll ask them what they meant by praising Walter and his crowd a little while ago, and as they are very independent and spunky, they will be sure to give us some impudence. When they do that, we'll tell them that we have seen quite enough of them, and that they can just pack up their traps and go home."

"It's almost too bad to go back on them in that way," said Seth. "They've stuck to us like bricks."

"And if you send them off it will break up our society and boat-club," said Will.

"No matter for that. The society and boat-club must not stand in the way of this plan. I am going to carry it out if I lose every friend I've got by it. You can stick to me or not, just as you please."

As Bayard said this he arose to his feet, indicating a desire to bring the interview to a close, and Chase and Wilson retreated backward until they were out of sight of the conspirators, and then took to their heels. They made the best of their way to the place where they had left their horses, and when Bayard and his cousins came in sight they were sitting on the bank of the bayou, looking steadily into the water. Something in their faces must have aroused Bayard's suspicions, for he glanced from one to the other and demanded:

"What's the matter with you fellows?"

"Nothing," replied Chase, sullenly.

"I know better," cried Bayard.

"So do I!" exclaimed Seth. "Something's the matter with you, or you would not have stood up for Walter and his crowd as you did a while ago. We think hard of you for that, and want to know what you meant by it. It would serve you just

right if we should put you where we're going to put——"

When Seth's tongue was once in motion he seemed to lose all control over it. He was on the very point of divulging the secret which he had so faithfully promised to keep inviolate; but an angry glance from Bayard, and a timely pinch from his brother, cut short his words.

"We haven't said or done anything that we are ashamed of," declared Chase. "If you don't like us or our ways, all you have to do is to tell us so."

"Well, we don't. There!" said Will.

"All right. Let's start for Bellville, Wilson. Good-by, fellows. When you want to make up a crew next summer to pull against the Sportsman's Club, call on somebody besides us; will you?"

Chase and Wilson sprang into their saddles and rode away, directing their course toward Mr. Bell's house, intending to get their saddle-bags, which contained the few articles of clothing which they had brought with them from home, and return to the village without the loss of a single hour; while Bayard and his cousins, after dancing a hornpipe to show the delight they felt at the success of their stratagem, set out for the dwelling of the French-

man, which was five miles distant. At the end of half an hour's rapid gallop they arrived within sight of it—a double log-house, flanked by corn-cribs and negro quarters, and standing in the middle of a clearing of about two hundred acres. Here old Coulte and his sons lived isolated from everybody; and before they engaged in the more lucrative business of smuggling, they had spent their summers in superintending the cultivation of a few acres of cotton and corn, and their winters in hunting.

As Bayard and his friends approached the house a man, who was sitting in the doorway smoking a cob-pipe, arose to welcome them. It was old Coulte himself—a little dried-up, excitable Frenchman, whose form was half bent with age, but who was nevertheless as sprightly as a boy of sixteen. Bayard, who was leading the way, reined up his horse with a jerk, and having come there on business opened it at once.

"Hallo, Coulte!" he exclaimed: "you're just the man I want to see. How's the wind to-day?"

The Frenchman started, and removing his pipe from his mouth replied slowly and almost reluctantly, as if the words were forcing themselves out in spite of all his efforts to prevent it: "Sou'

sou'-west." Then, as if he were alarmed at what he had done, he stamped his foot on the ground, exclaiming: "Vat you know about ze wind, Meester Bayard?"

"O, that's all right," replied Bayard, carelessly; "I know all about it. If it is south-south-west today, it was north-north-east last night. Coulte, may I say a word to you in private?"

The Frenchman, who appeared to be utterly confounded, stared very hard at the boys for a moment, took his pipe out of his mouth and gave a loud whistle, then put it in again, and picking up his hat followed Bayard, who dismounted and led the way toward a corn-crib that stood at a little distance from the house. When he seated himself on the ground and motioned Coulte to a place beside him, the latter gave another whistle louder than before; and having by this means worked off a little of his astonishment, he leaned forward and placed his hand on the boy's shoulder. "Meester Bayard," said he in a low, excited voice, "be you one of ze—ze—"

The word seemed to stick in his throat, but Bayard spoke it without the least difficulty. "One of the smugglers?" he inquired. "No; but I know

something about them. I say, Coulte, don't you think you are engaging in rather a risky business? Suppose it should be found out, what would become of you?"

The Frenchman took his pipe out of his mouth long enough to give another whistle, and then went on with his smoking.

"If I were disposed to be mean," continued Bayard, looking down at the ground and speaking in a low voice, as if he were talking more to himself than for the benefit of his companion, "I could make plenty of trouble for you by whispering about the settlement that your sons belong to the crew of that smuggling vessel, and that you have been seen with contraband goods in your possession. Let me see; the penalty is—I forget just what it is, but I know it is something terrible."

"Whew!" whistled Coulte, his face turning pale with alarm.

"Of course I have not the slightest intention of doing anything of the kind," continued Bayard; for you and I are old friends. But I say that if I *should* do it, it would be bad for you, wouldn't it? By the way—sit down here; I have a favor to ask of you, and I am sure that you will not refuse me."

Although the old Frenchman was one of the bravest hunters in the parish, and would not have hesitated a moment to attack the largest bear or panther single-handed, he was thoroughly cowed now Bayard knew what he was talking about when he said he was sure that Coulte would not refuse him the favor he was about to ask of him, for the old man was so badly frightened that he would have given up his ears if he had been commanded to do so. He seated himself on the ground beside the boy, and listened attentively while the latter unfolded his plans, only interrupting him occasionally with long-drawn whistles, which were very low at first and very loud at last, increasing in volume proportionately with the old man's astonishment. After Bayard finished his story, a few minutes' conversation followed, and finally the boy arose and walked toward his companions, leaving Coulte standing as if he were rooted to the ground.

"What success?" whispered Will, as Bayard swung himself into the saddle.

"The very best," was the exultant reply. "Walter Gaylord's goose is cooked now—done brown. In the first place, Coulte says that all the smuggling

is carried on in one small vessel named the Stella, which sails from the coast once every ten days. She is now hidden in the bay a few miles from here (I know right where she is, and have promised to visit her early to-morrow morning), and will leave for Cuba day after to-morrow. The only men on board are Coulte's two sons, who stayed to watch the vessel while the rest of the crew went to New Orleans to spend their money. They will return some time to-morrow, and consequently the work must be done to-night. Coulte says that he will go down at once and talk to his boys, and that Walter Gaylord shall be secured before morning. You're sorry for it, are you not?" he demanded, turning fiercely upon his cousins, who seemed to be disappointed rather than elated.

"No," replied Will, "I am not sorry, exactly, but I feel kind of—you know."

"I don't know anything about it," answered Bayard. "I never have such feelings."

"I feel afraid," said Seth, honestly. "Suppose something should happen?"

"O, now, what's going to happen? The only thing I am afraid of is that Walter will keep himself close to-night, or that if he does come out,

Coulte's boys will miss him. If they meet him at all, it will probably be while he is on horseback—the Club are always in the saddle—and I described him so minutely that they cannot possibly mistake him. Coulte's sons are not very well acquainted with Walter, you know, and I told him to tell them that if they saw a boy about my size and age riding a white horse, and wearing a heavy dark-blue cloak with a red lining, to catch him at all hazards and hold fast to him, for he is the fellow they want. Wasn't the old fellow taken down completely when I told him that I knew he was a smuggler? He could scarcely speak."

The boys faced-about in the saddle, and gazed back at the house. The Frenchman was still standing where they had left him, smoking furiously; and as they turned to look at him he took his pipe out of his mouth, and a long-drawn whistle came faintly to their ears. It was plain that he had not yet recovered from his astonishment.

CHAPTER VII.

BAYARD VISITS THE SCHOONER.

WHILE Bayard and his cousins were galloping through the swamp on their way to the old Frenchman's house, Henry Chase and Leonard Wilson were riding slowly along the road toward the residence of Mr. Bell. To say that they were astonished at what they had heard would not half express their feelings. They told themselves that they had never known anything about Bayard before that day, and were glad indeed that he had not asked their assistance in carrying out his plans. Chase was the first to speak.

"What shall we do about it?" he asked.

"I think our duty is very plain," replied Wilson. "In the first place, we ought to say that we will never have anything more to do with those fellows."

"I don't think we shall have any difficulty in carrying out that resolution," answered Chase, "for

it is plain that they have made up their minds to have nothing more to do with us."

"In the next place," continued Wilson, "we ought to go straight to Walter Gaylord and tell him to look out for himself, and to give Coulte and his sons a wide berth. I never heard of such a cowardly way of taking revenge before, and I could not sleep soundly again if I did not do something to prevent it. And in the third place, we ought to go home and tell our fathers everything we have heard. They will know just what ought to be done."

"I will agree to that—all except calling on Walter," replied Chase. "I don't want to meet him or any of the Club. If Mr. Gaylord or Uncle Dick should see us in the yard, they would order us out without giving us time to make known our business."

"We need not go there in the day-time. We will wait until after dark, and tell the person who answers our knock at the door that we want to see Walter a moment. Now that I think of it, what have these fellows done that we dislike them so much?"

If one might judge by Chase's actions, it was a

question that he did not care to answer. He looked very sheepish, gazed down at the handle of his riding-whip, and had nothing to say.

"It was very mortifying to be beaten in that boat-race, after we had bragged so lustily of our muscle and long wind, and all that," continued Wilson; "but it was fairly done, and we ought to have accepted the result like gentlemen."

"That's a fact," said Chase; "although it was a severe blow to me to have that little upstart, Fred Craven, elected Vice Commodore, when I wanted the position so badly, and tried so hard to get it."

"Well, he is a good sailor, and popular among the students; and perhaps you can thank yourself for your defeat. I tell you, Hank, this day's work has opened my eyes. I am going to turn over a new leaf and behave myself from this time forward, if I know how. Why, man alive, just think of it! What will the folks in Bellville say about us when it becomes known that we have been associating with fellows who have dealings with smugglers? Gracious! We're getting rather low down in the world, the first thing you know. Let's whip up,

and get our things out of that house before Bayard returns."

The boys urged their horses into a gallop, and in half an hour drew rein and dismounted in front of the porch at Mr. Bell's dwelling—a rambling old structure, which seemed in a fair way to crumble to pieces, and from the outside looked as though it was entirely deserted. The wide hall, which was destitute of furniture, echoed loudly as the boys passed through it, and the stairs creaked as they ascended them. They made their way to the room they occupied without meeting any one, and began to pack up their clothing. Wilson put on his overcoat, while Chase threw his cloak over his arm, picked up his saddle-bags, and turned and looked at his companion.

"I say!" he exclaimed, suddenly. "Don't this look rather—it isn't just the right thing now, is it?"

"What?" inquired Wilson.

"It's very ungentlemanly, not to say sneaking!"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, stealing out of the house without saying good-bye to anybody. Bayard's father and mother have treated us very kindly since we have been

here, and it would be rude in us to go off without taking leave of them."

"I know that; but I don't see how we are going to do it without telling them we had a falling out with Bayard, and, of course, we can't do that. We'll let him give his own version of the affair when he comes home, and I know it will be anything but flattering to us. What shall we say to them?"

"Leave it to me," replied Chase. "I'll fix it all right."

The boys being ready for the start picked up their luggage, descended the stairs, and in a few minutes more were standing in the library taking leave of Mr. and Mrs. Bell. Chase did all the talking, and succeeded in taking himself and companion through the interview in a perfectly satisfactory manner. Without alluding in any way to what had passed between them and Bayard, he gave their host to understand that certain circumstances had happened which rendered it necessary for them to start for home that very night; which, by the way, was the truth.

"That's over," said Chase, mounting his horse—which looked enough like the one Walter rode to

have been his brother—and leading the way at a rapid gallop toward the gate; "and now comes another unpleasant piece of business, which is to call upon the President of the Sportsman's Club. After that, a forty-mile ride over the muddiest road in the United States."

When the boys arrived within sight of the chimneys of Mr. Gaylord's dwelling, they became cautious in their movements, and if a stranger had seen them loitering about on the edge of the woods, and peeping through the bushes at the house, he would have looked at them rather suspiciously. He would not have supposed from their actions that they had come there on a friendly mission, but would have thought rather that they were a couple of burglars, who were taking notes of the mansion and its surroundings, and waiting for the darkness to hide their movements in order that they might make a descent upon the silver. They repeatedly declared that it "looked sneaking," but they lacked the courage to ride into the yard and face Walter Gaylord in broad daylight; although if he had come out into the woods where they were, they would have met him gladly. They watched the house closely, and Wilson kept his lips puckered

up in readiness for a whistle to attract the attention of the Club if they came out; but Eugene was fast asleep on the sofa in his uncle's cabin, Walter and Featherweight were busy with their books, Perk and Bab were deeply interested in their games of backgammon, and not one of them showed himself.

The afternoon wore slowly away; darkness came on apace, and Chase and Wilson, hungry and shivering with the cold, began walking their horses up and down the road, the former, who was to act as spokesman, repeating, for the twentieth time, what he intended to say to Walter when he came to the door. They passed the gate several times without possessing the courage to enter it, and each time they did so two men, who were closely watching all their movements, drew back into the bushes and concealed themselves.

"It must be done some time!" exclaimed Chase, at length, "and it might as well be done first as last. The sooner it is over the sooner we can start for home. Let's go in now."

As Chase said this he turned his horse, and put him into a full gallop, being determined to ride to the house and go through the interview with Walter, while he was in the humor for it. Arriving at

the gate, he bent down from the saddle and raised the latch; but just then a thought struck him, and he paused.

"Suppose Walter puts no faith in our story," said he; "what then? If he isn't suspicious that we are up to a trick of some kind, he will think it very strange that we, who were so friendly to Bayard this morning as to be willing to fight for him, should be at loggerheads with him now."

A long debate followed, the result of which was, that the boys determined to adhere to their resolution and warn Walter of his danger, leaving him to do as he pleased about believing their story. After that Chase once more rehearsed his speech in order to fix it in his memory, and again placed his hand on the latch; but just as the gate swung open and he was on the point of riding through, two dark figures suddenly appeared beside him; and while one seized his horse by the bridle, the other caught him by the arm and dragged him to the ground, placing a brawny hand over his mouth, to stifle his cries for help.

"I've got him, Edmund," said the latter, in a hoarse whisper. "Bring your light. Make your-

CHASE CAPTURED BY THE SMUGGLERS.

self scarce about here," he added, addressing himself to Wilson.

The man who had been called Edmund released the horse, and hurrying up to his companion, produced a dark-lantern from the pocket of his coat, and turned the slide. When the light blazed up, Wilson, who had sat motionless in his saddle, too nearly overwhelmed with astonishment to hear the words that had been spoken to him, saw that the men wore pea-jackets, and that they looked like sailors. He tried to get a glimpse of their features, but the lower portions of their faces were concealed by heavy mufflers, and their tarpaulins were slouched over their foreheads, so that nothing but their eyes could be seen.

"It's him, ain't it?" asked Edmund. "Here's the white horse, the blue cloak with the red lining, the long, curly hair, the heavy boots and silver spurs, and the riding-whip with an ivory handle. Yes, it's him. If you want to see daylight again, you had better be getting away from here," he added, turning fiercely upon Wilson.

As the man spoke, he thrust his hand into the pocket of his pea-jacket and drew it out again, bringing with it a double-barrelled pistol. The

sight of the weapon must have restored Wilson's power of action, for he wheeled his horse and galloped swiftly down the road, closely followed by Chase's nag, which seemed unwilling to be left behind.

The suddenness of the assault, and the violence with which he was handled, rendered Chase for a few seconds speechless with surprise and alarm; and when he recovered himself sufficiently to understand what was going on, it was too late to resist and dangerous to cry out, for his hands and feet were securely tied, and a pistol was levelled at his head.

"We've got nothing against you, and we don't want to hurt you," whispered the man who held the weapon; "but you mustn't make any fuss—mind that."

"What are you going to do with me, anyhow? and what do you mean by assaulting me in this manner?" asked Chase, as soon as he could speak.

"Keep perfectly still, now, and don't say another word," was the satisfactory reply. "It's enough for you to know that you are wanted."

As the man said this he lifted his prisoner from the ground as easily as though he had been an in-

fant, and placing him on his shoulders started through the bushes toward the beach; while the other put his lantern into his pocket, and hurried along in advance of him, keeping a sharp look-out on all sides. Although Chase's brain was in a great whirl, he retained his wits sufficiently to notice that the course the men were pursuing would take them within a short distance of Mr. Gaylord's house. He could see the lights in the window, which appeared to be dancing about among the trees as he bobbed up and down on the shoulders of the man who carried him, and he listened intently, hoping that some of the Club's hounds would discover him and his captors, and give the alarm; but nothing of the kind happened. The men moved rapidly, but with cautious footsteps, and in a few minutes carried their prisoner down the bank and laid him in a yawl, which was moored at the jetty in front of Mr. Gaylord's boat-house.

As he was placed on the bottom of the boat, under the thwarts, with his face downward, and the gunwales were so high that he could not look over them, he could not tell in what direction the men were taking him. They moved steadily for two hours without exchanging a word, and during that

time Chase had ample leisure to think over his situation. At last his ears told him that the men had taken in their oars, and were pushing the yawl through a dense thicket of bushes, and a few minutes afterward a sudden jar, which was followed by a violent rocking of the boat, indicated that it had come in contact with something.

"Here we are at last," said one of the men, and Chase thought, from the tone in which he spoke the words, that he was glad that the work was over.

"I wish I was somewhere else," said the prisoner. "Now, perhaps you will be good enough to tell me why you brought me here?"

"That's something that we have nothing to do with," answered the man, as he busied himself in untying his captive's feet, while the rattle of the painter showed that his companion was engaged in making the yawl fast. "It is no part of our business to answer questions. All I can tell you is that we're not going to hurt you if you behave yourself."

This assurance removed a heavy burden of anxiety from the mind of the prisoner, who now, being relieved of all apprehensions concerning his personal

safety, raised himself to a sitting posture and began to look about him with some curiosity. He noted two things: that the yawl was lying alongside a small schooner, and that the schooner was anchored in a little cove which was surrounded on all sides by a dense wall of trees and bushes. He did not have time to make any further observations, for his captors, who seemed to be in a great hurry to dispose of him, assisted him rather roughly out of the boat to the deck of the vessel, dragged him down a hatchway, and thrusting him into a little locker, left him to his meditations.

Bayard Bell did not sleep a wink that night, but tossed uneasily on his bed, thinking over his plans, and waiting impatiently for daylight. He had heard of such things as smuggling vessels, and was anxious to see one; and, more than that, he wanted to know how Walter Gaylord would look bound hand and foot, and what he would say when he learned that he was to be carried away from his home and put where he would never find his way back to it again.

"I'll tell him that I am at the bottom of all his troubles," said Bayard to himself. "I'll say to him: 'Walter Gaylord, I studied up this plan and

put it into execution myself; and I have done it to show you that no boy can treat me as you have done with impunity. You think yourself some pumpkins because you beat me in that boat-race, and because the fellows elected you Commodore of the Yacht Club over me. What good will that office do you, I'd like to know? Where will you be when we go on our regular cruise next summer? Somebody will command the yachts and fly the Commodore's broad pennant, but it won't be you—it will be a fellow about my size, and who looks just like me. And that same fellow will win the champion colors, too, next summer, for you needn't think that the Sportsman's Club is going to hold them.' That's the way I'll talk to him for a while, and then I will begin to abuse him. Perhaps he will be impudent—I hope he will, for that will give me an excuse for hitting him a cut or two with my riding-whip. I wish it was morning."

The long hours of the night wore away at last, and as soon as the first gray streak of the dawn was seen in the east, Bayard sprang out of bed and aroused his cousins. They, too, had passed an almost sleepless night, and were ready to start for the smuggling vessel at once, and without waiting

for their breakfast. Their horses were quickly saddled, and after a three hours' hard gallop Bayard led his cousins into a thickly-wooded ravine, and dismounted.

"Coulte told me particularly to leave our nags here," said he. "The schooner is only about a quarter of a mile away, and if some one should happen to be prowling about, and should find our horses hitched on the bank near her hiding-place, it might lead to her discovery. I don't want to do anything to endanger the existence of that band, for I am going to join it some day."

Having seen the horses concealed to his satisfaction, Bayard led his companions out of the ravine and across a narrow bottom, which was rendered almost impassable by the water and ice; and presently arrived on the bank of the cove where the schooner was hidden. The crew had heard them coming through the bushes and were evidently on the watch, for the boys saw three pairs of eyes looking at them over the top of the rail. As they stepped out into view the persons to whom the eyes belonged arose from their crouching posture, and then the boys saw that they were Coulte and his two sons. They saw at the same glance that the

old man was greatly troubled about something, for he was smoking fast and furiously, and when he looked toward Bayard he wrung his hands and walked nervously up and down the deck. While the boys stood watching him and wondering what could be the matter, his sons clambered down into the yawl and came to the shore after them. As they approached, Bayard told himself that something had gone wrong with them too, for they took no notice of his greeting, but glared savagely at him, as if they had half a mind to lay violent hands upon him. Their looks were enough to frighten Will, who whispered to his cousin :—

"If we once get out of this scrape I'll never have anything more to do with these men. I am afraid of them."

"Nonsense! Don't be uneasy," replied Bayard, carelessly. "They are mad because we know that they belong to the smugglers. Let's see them help themselves. We've got them completely under our thumbs."

Having by this time reached the schooner, Bayard sprang over the rail and looked about him with much interest. Naval etiquette was strictly enforced by the rules of the yacht club of which he

was a member, and his first move was to salute the quarter-deck, which he did with as much dignity as though he had been an admiral, and his next to make a hasty but critical examination of the schooner. She was about fifty tons burden, long and narrow, with a black hull, and tall, raking masts, and was supplied with more canvas than vessels of her size generally carry. It was plain that she had been built for speed, and that she was commanded by an experienced sailor, for her rigging was well kept, and her deck was in the best possible order. Bayard was delighted with her.

"Isn't she a beauty?" he cried, turning to his cousins. "I don't wonder that she has never been caught; for I will warrant that she can out-sail any revenue cutter in Uncle Sam's service. Well, Coulte, good morning! You didn't sleep very well last night, judging by your appearance."

The Frenchman paused long enough to take his pipe out of his mouth and give utterance to a shrill whistle, and then put it in again, and continued his walk up and down the deck; while his boys folded their arms and leaned sullenly against the rail. Bayard looked from one to the other of them and exclaimed impatiently,

"What's the matter with everybody? That s what I want to know. Coulte, stand still and talk to me."

"O, Meester Payard!" cried the old man, wringing his hands violently; "vat a grand mistake is here—one grand big mistake. Ah! oui! whew!"

Coulte whistled long and loud, took a few more pulls at his pipe, and went on,

"You zee, Meester Payard, my leetle poys don't know Meester Valter zo very vell—zey don't seen him very many times. Zey go down last night to Meester Gaylord's house, and zey—zey—whew!"

"Well, what did they do? Go on," commanded Bayard.

The old Frenchman tried his best to comply, but his astonishment, or perplexity, or something else choked his utterance. He took a few more puffs at his pipe, and beckoning to Bayard, led the way forward and down a ladder into the hold.

"It's all right, boys," whispered Bayard, gleefully. "I thought at first that they hadn't got him. No doubt they hurt him a little in capturing him, and that's what troubles Coulte."

"Perhaps they hurt him too much," said Will,

with a look of alarm. "Who knows that they did'nt kill him?"

"Eh?" exclaimed Bayard, his face growing pale with apprehension. "O, no; they didn't do that; they would n't be such fools."

Bayard spoke confidently enough, but the words of his cousin terrified him, and it was with a great deal of impatience that he followed the deliberate movements of the old Frenchman. When the latter reached the hold, he paused long enough to light a lantern, after which he led the way to a small locker in the extreme forward part of the vessel. He opened the door, and handing the lantern to Bayard, stepped back and motioned him to enter. The boy glanced timidly into the room, and then looked suspiciously at Coulte, as if he feared that the latter were about to try some trick upon him; but a second glance into the locker reassured him. There was a prisoner there, and at the sight of him Bayard uttered a shout of triumph. He did not see much of him—nothing but his boots, for the rest of his body was hidden behind a coil of rope; but that was enough for Bayard, who knew those boots and the little silver spurs that were attached to the heels. He stepped

quickly into the room, and holding the lantern over the coil of rope so that its rays fell full upon the face of the captive, exclaimed:

"Well, my young boy, didn't we tell you yesterday that you hadn't seen the last of us?"

"Bayard Bell, is this some of your work?" asked a familiar voice.

It was not Walter Gaylord's voice. If it had been it would not have produced such an effect upon Bayard and his cousins. The former started back, almost dropping the lantern in his bewilderment, while Seth and Will crowded into the locker and looked over their cousin's shoulder.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT HAPPENED THERE.

"WELL, if this doesn't beat anything I ever heard of!" said Seth, in a frightened whisper. "That isn't *him*, is it?"

"No sir, it isn't. It is somebody else, as sure as you are alive," replied Will. "It is—it is—"

"I want to know if I have you to thank for this?" repeated the prisoner, raising himself to a sitting posture, and looking over the coil of rope at the astonished boys. "Why don't you say something."

Bayard was so utterly confounded that for a few seconds he could not speak. He stood as if he had been turned into a wooden boy, and then, rubbing his eyes and staring hard at the prisoner, to make sure that he was awake, called out in tones indicative of great excitement, "Hank Chase!"

"Yes, it is Hank Chase, and nobody else," replied the owner of that name, indignantly. "Now,

I want to know what you brought me here for, and what you intend to do with me?"

Bayard, who quickly recovered from his bewilderment, leaned forward to take a nearer view of the prisoner, and, paying no heed to his entreaties that he would release him, or at least explain his reasons for having him brought there, walked slowly out of the room, followed by his cousins. After closing and fastening the door, he handed the lantern to Coulte, and began pacing thoughtfully up and down the hold, thrashing his boots with his riding-whip at every step.

"Haven't we got ourselves into a pretty scrape?" said Seth, after a little pause.

"Shut your mouth!" exclaimed Bayard, savagely.

"Haven't we, though?" cried Will. "That plan of yours, for getting even with Walter Gaylord, has worked splendidly, hasn't it? I wish I was a million miles from here. I am going to start for home this very day."

"So am I," said his brother.

"Hold your tongues, I say; both of you," shouted Bayard, raising his riding-whip, as if he had half a mind to use it on them.

"You zee, Meester Payard," observed Coulte, shrugging his shoulders and waving his hands, as if to say that *he* was in noway to blame, "my leetle poys have made one big—one magnifique mistake."

"Are these 'the little boys' who have made this 'magnificent mistake?'" asked Bayard, looking contemptuously at the two tall, broad-shouldered men, who stood leaning against a stanchion close by, waiting to see how the interview would end. "I call them pretty good-sized boys, and think they might have known better. They are blockheads, both of them. Now, I want you to tell me how you came to make this blunder."

Edmund and his brother were sullen at first, but after a few words of encouragement from their father, they began and told the story of Chase's capture, just as we have related it. They wound up by saying that they could not see where they were to blame. Their father had visited them the day before, according to promise, and, after informing them that Bayard had it in his power to make serious trouble for them if he chose to do so, and gaining their consent to assist him in carrying out his plans, had told them that if they saw a boy riding a white horse, and wearing a blue cloak with

a red lining, and heavy top-boots, armed with small silver spurs, to make a prisoner of him. They had met a horseman who had answered to the description perfectly, and had captured him according to orders—a proceeding on their part that they were now heartily sorry for. It was no fault of theirs that it proved to be the wrong boy, for they did not know that there were two fellows in the settlement who rode white horses, and wore blue cloaks with red linings, and besides, they were not well enough acquainted with Walter Gaylord to tell him from anybody else. When their father came over that morning to ascertain how they had carried out their instructions, he saw at a glance that they had made a mistake, and that was the first intimation they had had of the fact. Some portions of their story must have astonished and alarmed Bayard, for he stood with his mouth and eyes open, listening intently, and his face was as pale as a sheet. When the men ceased speaking, he went into the locker, closing the door after him.

"Chase," said he, "I want to ask you something: What were you and Wilson doing in Mr. Gaylord's yard last night after dark?"

"Eh?" ejaculated the prisoner, surprised and

disconcerted by the abruptness with which the question was asked; "I—you see—"

"Yes, I do see," exclaimed Bayard, in a voice which trembled with anger or terror, Chase could not tell which. "I see that my suspicions are confirmed. I knew yesterday that I ought to look out for you, for there was something in your eye that told me that you and Wilson had overheard what I said to my cousins about the smugglers. This is what you get for playing eavesdropper, my young friend, and by meddling with things that do not concern you. It serves you just right."

Bayard came out and slammed the door of the locker, without waiting to hear what else the prisoner had to say. His face was paler than it was when he went in, but that was not to be wondered at, for he knew that there was a boy in the settlement who was acquainted with his secret, and that he had made an enemy of him. He was afraid of Wilson now. Where was he? He might be in Bellville—very likely he was, for he rode a swift horse which could easily carry him there in one night—and perhaps, by this time, half the citizens of the place had heard of the plans Bayard had laid against Walter Gaylord. He trembled when he thought

what a commotion the news would create in that quiet town. Everybody there knew Walter and liked him; and every one able to ride a horse, from the President of the Academy down to the smallest student, would turn out to assist him and hunt down the smugglers; and what would they do with the boy who had caused all this trouble? Bayard asked himself. The question troubled him. He saw that he had got himself into a terrible scrape, and was almost overwhelmed with alarm when he thought of the probable consequences of his act; but when he spoke, it was with great calmness and deliberation.

"This is none of my funeral, Coulte," said he, "and I wash my hands of the whole affair. Two courses of action are open to you: You can release your captive, or you can take him to the West Indies and lose him there, as you intended to do with Walter Gaylord. My advice to you, however, is to hold fast to him; for if you should set him at liberty he would blow on you before night, and then where would you be? But the matter doesn't interest me one way or the other. Do as you please. Come on, fellows; there is work before us, and we've not an instant of time to fool away."

As Bayard said this he placed his foot on the ladder and was about to ascend to the deck, when a shrill whistle sounded from the shore. It had a strange effect upon some of those who heard it, for Coulte once more began to wring his hands, while his sons, Edmund and Pierre, started up and looked about them in alarm.

"What's the trouble now?" asked Bayard. "Who's out there?"

"Ah! every dings is going wrong—oui! every dings," exclaimed Coulte. "Zare is ze captain Whew!"

The old Frenchman had been terrified before; he was doubly so now. Bayard did not pay much attention to him, for he knew that he was so excitable that he sometimes became unreasonably agitated over a very trifling matter; but when he saw that Edmund and Pierre were uneasy, he began to think there might be good cause for alarm.

"The captain!" repeated Bayard; "what would he say to us if he should find us here?"

"He mustn't find you here," said Edmund, who seemed to be alarmed at the bare thought of such a thing. "And you won't be safe any where now that he has come, for he will look all over the ves-

sel before he goes away, to make sure that everything is right. I wish you were at home, where you belong."

"So do I," said Seth, heartily.

"And I wish you had been in Guinea last night, for then you wouldn't have captured Hank Chase instead of Walter Gaylord," said Bayard. "That mistake will get you into serious trouble if you don't mind what you are about."

"Vel, vat shall be done," asked Coulte, as another shrill whistle rang through the vessel, this time louder than before, showing that the captain was becoming impatient at the delay. "Vare shall ve hide these leetle poys?"

"Let them go into the cabin," said Pierre, who had not yet spoken. "Edmund and I will take the yawl and go off after the captain, and when we come back we'll make her fast to the stem of the schooner. Then let the boys watch their chance, and when we come below with the captain, let them climb out of the cabin windows into the yawl and put for the shore."

This plan seemed to meet with approval from everybody, for Pierre and his brother at once ascended to the deck, and the boys followed Coulte,

who beckoned them toward the cabin. Bayard wondered how the captain would get ashore if they went away with the boat, but as that was a matter of no interest to him, he did not waste time thinking about it. He did not care if the captain never set his foot on shore again, if he and his companions could only leave the vessel before they were discovered by him.

Arriving at the after-end of the hold, Coulte pushed open a door and ushered the boys into the cabin; and after urging them to keep their eyes and ears open, and to be ready to get into the yawl the moment they heard the captain coming below, he closed the door and left them. Will and Seth, who were intensely excited and alarmed, ran at once to the window, drew aside the curtain and looked out; while Bayard, who seemed disposed to take matters very coolly, and who was anxious to learn all he could about the smuggling vessel during the few minutes he had to remain on board of her, began to take a thorough survey of the cabin. It was a gloomy uninviting apartment, and Bayard thought that if he had been the master of the schooner he would have made a good many improvements in it. There was no carpet on the floor, and

a worn-out sofa, a table and two or three chairs completed the furniture. Two doors, one on each side, opened into dark, uncomfortable looking state-rooms, each containing a bed which apparently had not been made up since it was brought on board the vessel. Bayard told himself that he would be in no haste to join the smugglers if he knew that he would be obliged to sleep in such beds as those; and perhaps if he could have seen the bunks in the forecastle he might have given up the idea altogether.

While Bayard was making his observations, Seth and Will, who were impatient to get a glimpse of the captain of the smugglers, ran their eyes along the shore as far as they could see it from the window, and presently discovered the object of their curiosity, who was leaning against a tree, engaged in whittling a switch with his knife. His back was turned partly toward them, and his hat was drawn over his forehead so that they could not see his features; but they were certain that he was no stranger to them, for there was something about him that looked familiar. Just then the yawl pushed off from the schooner, and as it approached the bank where he was standing, the man straightened

up and turned his face toward the boys at the window, so that they had a fair view of it. Could they believe their eyes? They gazed at him a moment, while an expression of blank amazement overspread their countenances, and then dropping the curtain they drew back from the window with as much haste as though the captain had suddenly levelled a revolver at them.

"What's the trouble now?" snarled Bayard. "Anything else wrong?"

"Come here," said Will, in reply, "and tell me if you think that is the man who is the captain of this band of smugglers."

Bayard stepped to the window and looked out; but after he had taken one short glance at the figure who was just then stepping into the yawl, he sprang back into the middle of the cabin and gazed about him as if he were searching for some avenue of escape.

"It's my father, as sure as the world," said he, with a gasp.

"I thought it was Uncle David," exclaimed Will.

"I was certain I couldn't be mistaken," chimed in Seth.

"And I would rather it was anybody else on

earth," continued Bayard. "I wouldn't have him catch me here for any money. Why it doesn't seem possible, and I can't understand it at all," he added, stepping to the window again and looking cautiously out. "But it must be that he belongs here, for he has got into the yawl and is talking to Coulte's boys."

Bayard's surprise, perplexity, and terror were almost unbounded, and he did not wonder now that Coulte was alarmed when he knew that the captain was standing on the bank waiting to be brought on board the vessel. What would Mr. Bell say to him and his cousins if he should chance to find them in the cabin, and what would he do? This was something that Bayard did not like to think about. He kept one corner of the curtain raised, so that he could observe the movements of the yawl, while his cousins sank helplessly down upon the sofa, listening intently, and scarcely daring to breathe, lest their uncle should hear it. In a few minutes the boat reached the schooner, and Bayard heard his father clamber over the side. One of Coulte's sons also sprang out, and the other dropped the yawl astern and made it fast there in such a

position that the painter hung down directly in front of one of the windows.

"That's the idea!" said Bayard approvingly. "The way of escape is open to us now. You listen at the door, Will, and tell me when you hear any one coming down the ladder, and I will open the window, so that we can crawl out at an instant's warning."

"But how are we going to cast off the painter?" asked Seth. "It's made fast on deck, and of course we can't go up there."

"We won't stop to cast it off, we'll cut it; and you had better have your knife out, all ready."

"What do you suppose Uncle David will think, when he finds the painter cut and the boat gone?"

"We don't care what he thinks. We'll let Coulte and his boys explain that in any way they please. We want to get out of this schooner as soon as we can—that's all that interests us just at present. Don't this morning's work beat you?"

While Bayard was speaking he had opened the window very slowly and carefully, and seizing the painter drew the yawl close up under the stern. Scarcely had this been done when Will announced,

in an excited whisper, that there was some one coming down the ladder.

"It is time for us to be moving, then," said Bayard, as soon as he had satisfied himself that Will's ears had not deceived him. "Seth, give me your knife, and you and Will jump into the boat and be ready to shove off when I say the word. Be lively, now, but don't be in too great a hurry, for the more haste the less speed, you know."

Had Bayard been as excited as his cousins were, it is very probable that they would not have succeeded in effecting their escape from the cabin in time to avoid discovery. The two brothers displayed a great deal of awkwardness, and made considerable noise in getting through the window; and had it not been for Bayard's help they might have stuck fast there. He held the curtain up with one hand, assisted his cousins with the other, and at the same time kept his eyes fastened on the door which he expected to see opened every instant. The voices and footsteps came nearer and nearer, and, just as a hand was laid upon the latch, Bayard dropped the curtain to its place, sprang lightly into the boat, and with one swift blow with the knife cut

the painter. Their escape had been a very narrow one, and he too began to be excited.

"Shove off," said he, in a hoarse whisper, "and pull around the schooner, for fear that father might come to the window and look out."

The bushes were thick, and it was a matter of some difficulty to push the heavy yawl through them; but the boys exerted all their muscle, and made such good use of their time that they succeeded in reaching the shore before any of the crew returned to the deck.

"That danger's over," said Seth, with a long breath of relief.

"Yes, but there's another hanging over our heads," returned Will. "Suppose Uncle David should happen to go into that locker and find Hank Chase there?"

"And suppose Leonard Wilson should happen to go to Bellville and tell all he knows about us and our plans?" said Bayard. "That's another danger that you haven't thought of."

"Leonard Wilson!" repeated Seth. "What does he know about us?"

"He knows all about us. Didn't Edmund and Pierre say that they saw him and Chase going into

Mr Gaylord's yard? Now, what were they going to do in there?"

Seth and Will looked at their cousin, but made no reply. Their wits were not as sharp as Bayard's, and they did not understand the matter as well as he did.

"Humph!" exclaimed the latter, in great disgust; "can't you see through it yet? You are the most stupid fellows I ever met in my life. The amount of the matter is, that, while I was telling you my plans yesterday those fellows sneaked up on us and overheard every word I said. We made them mad at us, and they thought they would block our game by putting a flea in Walter Gaylord's ear. They were on their way to call on him when Edmund and Pierre captured Chase. Wilson was allowed to go free, and of course he will put straight for the village, and tell everything he knows. We're in a pretty pickle, the first thing you know, but there is one way of escape for us. We must—what's that?"

It was the sound of a horse's hoofs that had attracted Bayard's attention. The boys all heard it now, and, if they had not been so fully occupied with something else they might have heard it long

before, for the horseman was close upon them. They did not care to be seen by him, for he might be one of the smugglers. They dived into the bushes with a common impulse, and they were not an instant too soon, for scarcely had they concealed themselves when a chestnut-sorrel pony appeared, running at the top of his speed, his rider bending forward in his saddle, and holding his arm before his face to prevent the bushes and the branches of the trees from coming in contact with it. The pony stopped when he arrived upon the bank of the cove, and his rider straightened up and pushed back his hat, disclosing to view the features of Fred Craven, who opened his eyes in surprise when he discovered the schooner lying at anchor among the bushes.

CHAPTER IX.

WHERE FEATHERWEIGHT WAS.

FRED CRAVEN was a famous rifle-shot, and although he was a "towny," he was superior in all manner of backwoods accomplishments to any boy of his age in the settlement—even to Walter and Eugene, who lived in the woods, and who had handled shot-guns and rifles all their lives. He was an enthusiastic and persevering sportsman, and boasted that he never came back from a hunt empty-handed. When the Club went out on their shooting excursions, Featherweight always strayed off by himself; and when he met his companions again at night, he had more game to show than any of them, sometimes beating all the rest of the Club put together. He thought almost as much of his pony as he did of any of his friends, and took great delight in training Flyaway, his favorite hound.

Flyaway was a remarkable dog in the estimation of his young master, although he did not stand very high in the opinion of the rest of the Club. He would hunt a covey of quails with as much skill as any old setter, would bring ducks out of the water as well as a spaniel, and fight a bear as bravely as any dog in Mr. Gaylord's pack; but he had never hunted wild hogs, and Featherweight was anxious to see what work he would make at it. While the line was being formed that morning, and the boys and the negroes were about to advance toward the old bee-tree to attack the hogs which made their harboring-place there, Walter, who was a very prudent and cautious fellow, and seldom got into trouble, and who knew that Featherweight was sometimes disposed to be a little too reckless for his own good, thought it best to give him a word of advice.

"Now, Fred," said he, "wild hogs are things not to be fooled with, and if I were in your place I wouldn't put too much dependence on that animal there," pointing rather contemptuously at Flyaway. "He is a very good turkey and deer dog, but when he presumes to hunt such game as this

we are after now, he is getting above his business. A full grown wild hog is a terrible fighter."

"Having hunted them a few times in my life, I am not ignorant of that fact," replied Featherweight, assuming an air of importance that always made the Club laugh, and speaking with as much dignity as so jolly a little fellow could command. "While I entertain the very highest respect for your opinions in general, and acknowledge that you are a good judge of horses, and a passable hand at hunting small game, such as squirrels and quails, I must be allowed to remark that I think you know nothing whatever about dogs. 'That animal,' as you are pleased to call Flyaway, has no superior in this parish."

"Well," returned Walter, with a laugh, "keep close to us, and if you get into a scrape we can lend you a hand."

But Featherweight, being plucky and independent, did not see fit to follow this advice. He kept his hound close at his side while the line was moving toward the old bee-tree, and when the hogs were started he picked out the one that he thought was the largest and ordered Flyaway to catch it. The hound sprang forward at the word, and in an

instant both he and the hog were out of sight in the cane.

Featherweight's pony had so often shown his heels to the other horses owned by the Club, that his master had become vain of his speed, and boasted that he could not be beaten by anything; but distancing a horse on a smooth road, or over a level field, where there were no greater obstructions than logs and low fences to be encountered, was one thing, and running a race with a wild hog through a thick woods, the hog having nearly a hundred yards the start, was another. The animal made astonishing headway, and for a long time the boy could not come within sight of him. The noise he occasioned in running through the cane, and the angry yelps now and then uttered by the hound, guided the young hunter in the pursuit; but although he urged his pony forward by voice, whip and spur, he could not lessen the distance between them.

"I never knew before that a hog could run so," soliloquized Featherweight; "and I never thought either that Flyaway was a coward. He is keeping within sight of that hog all the time, but he won't catch him. Rex would have had him by the ear

long ago. Hi! hi! Why don't you take hold of him there?"

The hound replied with a short, quick bark, and a commotion in the bushes told the young hunter that he was doing his best to obey the command. Featherweight yelled encouragingly and urged on his horse, which with a few more jumps brought his rider to the scene of the conflict—or, rather, to the spot where it had taken place; for when Featherweight reached it the struggle was over. Flyaway was a badly-whipped dog, and the wild hog was out of sight.

"Now just look at that!" exclaimed the boy, indignantly, gazing after his hound which was retreating precipitately through the cane, with his sides bleeding from several ugly-looking wounds made by the long teeth of the wild hog. "That puts an end to your hunting for a month or two, my fine fellow; perhaps for ever. I'll capture that hog now if I have to follow him for a week. I'll try to tire him out and ride him down; and if I can't do that, I'll head him off and turn him back toward the old bee-tree, so that some of the other dogs can have a chance at him."

Featherweight, knowing that his wounded favo-

rite would make the best of his way to Mr. Gaylord's house, and that when he arrived there he would receive every attention from Uncle Jim, the old negro who had charge of the hounds, once more put spurs to his pony and dashed through the cane in hot pursuit of the hog. He did not follow directly after him, but gradually turned off to the left of the trail, hoping to pass him and compel him to turn back in the direction from which he had come.

How long the chase continued Featherweight could not have told. The rapid pace soon began to tell upon the pony, which showed a desire to settle down into a slow gallop; but the hog went ahead as swiftly as ever. As the boy had eyes and ears for nothing except the game he was pursuing, he did not know in what direction he was going or where he was, until he discovered an opening through the trees in front of him, and came suddenly upon the bank of the cove where the smugglers' schooner was hidden. He thought he must be close upon the hog now, for, just as he drew rein, he heard a rustling among the bushes a little distance off; but had he investigated the manner, he would have found that the noise was not occasioned by the wild hog, but by Bayard Bell and his

cousins, who were concealed behind a log, watching his movements.

The sight of a schooner hidden away among the bushes in that lonely place was a most unexpected one to the eyes of the young hunter, and speedily drove all thought of the game out of his mind. He could not account for her presence there, and the longer he looked at her the more he wondered, and the more surprised he became. He ran his eye all over the vessel, noting the fine points about her that had so deeply interested Bayard Bell, but he could not discover anything that looked familiar, and he was finally obliged to conclude that he never had seen her before.

"I've lost the hog," said Featherweight to himself, gazing all around him to see if there were any of the crew of the vessel in sight, "but I've found a schooner. Who owns her? Who brought her here? Where are the men who belong to her, and why is she hidden away in this cove? I can't see any one about her," he added, seizing a branch above his head and standing erect in his saddle to obtain a view of her deck. "Yes, sir; she's deserted, and here's her yawl lying on the shore.

Now, that's lucky. I'll just step aboard and examine into things a little."

As Featherweight said this he hitched his pony to a limb of the tree, sprang to the ground, and in a few seconds more was pushing the yawl through the bushes toward the schooner. Had he gone around the stern and looked in at one of the windows—the curtains were raised now—he would have seen that the vessel was not deserted, and that there were four men there engaged in consultation: but he pulled straight toward the bow, and after making the yawl's painter fast to the bobstay, sprang over the rail and looked about him. He could see no one. He listened, but could hear nothing, for the door leading into the cabin was closed, thus shutting out the sound of the conversation carried on by the captain and his men. Stepping to the forehatch he looked down into the hold, and the first object that caught his eye was a lighted lantern, standing at the foot of the ladder—the same one Bayard had used during his interview with the prisoner.

"That's the very thing I need," said Featherweight, as he descended into the hold. "I will look all over this craft now, and see if I can find

something to tell me what she is and where she belongs. Suppose she should prove to be a private yacht, whose owner has come up here with a party of friends to go deer-hunting? If they should return suddenly and find me prowling about, they might not like it. Perhaps it would teach them that it is a good plan to leave a watch on board a vessel."

The first thing Featherweight noticed when he reached the bottom of the ladder was, that for a vessel the size of the schooner, her hold was very shallow. He could scarcely stand erect in it. He was surprised at this, and he would have been still more surprised if he had known that the floor of the hold was provided with a fore, main and after hatchway, like the deck above, and that they led down into a second hold—the real hold of the vessel, in fact—which was nearly as large as the one in which he was then standing. He learned all about that, however, and about a good many other things, before he got through with the schooner. If he had known all that was to happen to him before he put his foot on shore again, he would have got out of that vessel without the loss of a single instant.

The hold was empty, and Featherweight did not see anything to attract his attention until he crawled through a narrow passage-way that led around the forecastle to the extreme forward part of the vessel. There he discovered a locker, and the key was in the door. Little dreaming what was on the other side of that door, he turned the key, and holding his lantern above his head looked into the room. He was not easily frightened, but he saw something that made the cold chills creep all over him, and caused him to utter a cry of alarm and stagger back into the hold as if some one had struck him a blow. It was a pale, haggard face which looked at him over the top of a coil of rope. He did not see anything familiar in it, but he recognised the voice which asked in indignant tones:

"Are you ready to answer my question now?"

The sound of the voice quieted Featherweight's nerves, and after a moment's hesitation he stepped into the locker and lowered his lantern so that he could obtain a fair view of the face. "It can't be possible that this—Chase, what in the name of wonder are you doing in this hole?" he asked, as soon

as he had satisfied himself as to the identity of the occupant of the locker.

"Fred Craven!" cried the prisoner, in great amazement. "Well, I am beaten, now. I am taken all aback."

"So am I," replied Featherweight. "What are you doing here?"

"I didn't know that you were one of these fellows."

"What fellows?"

"I should be glad if you would bring me a mouthful to eat, for I am almost famished," continued Chase, without answering Featherweight's question. "But first I want to know why you brought me here, and what you intend to do with me?"

"I!" Featherweight almost shouted; "what did I have to do with bringing you here?"

"Well, you know something about it, don't you?"

"*I!*" repeated Featherweight, growing more and more bewildered. "Boy, you're crazy. Why don't you get up and come out from behind that coil of rope?"

"Look here!" exclaimed the prisoner, who did

not seem to understand the matter at all; "are you not one of them?"

"One of whom?"

"Don't you belong to the band?"

"What band?"

"Why, the smugglers."

"Eh! Chase, you're dreaming."

"Do I dream that I am a prisoner?"

"A prisoner!"

"Yes; and that I have been shut up here ever since last night? If you are not one of them, what made you come here? How did you get aboard?"

"I came off in the yawl. I found it on shore."

"Did you?" exclaimed Chase, eagerly. "That accounts for it. I understand the matter, now."

"I don't," replied Featherweight. "I am all in the dark."

"If you will release me I will soon enlighten you. You will have to use your knife, for my hands are tied behind my back, and one end of the rope is made fast to a ring-bolt in the deck, so that I can't get up."

Featherweight was more amazed than ever when he found that Chase was a prisoner, but he refrained from asking any questions, knowing that in due

time he would hear all about it. He forgot now that Chase was his sworn enemy, and that only the day before he had been standing face to face with him in a hostile attitude, and that when Bayard and his men approached to attack the Sportsman's Club, Chase had singled him out as his own special object of vengeance, and made at him as though he meant to tear him in pieces. Featherweight did not care to remember this against him now; but Chase must have thought of it, for when his visitor placed his lantern on the floor, and, clambering over the coil of rope, bent down to untie the prisoner's arms, the latter said, with some embarrassment—

"Fred, I little thought yesterday that I should ever have to ask a favor of you."

"Never mind it now," replied Featherweight. "I didn't bear you any ill-will, and I hope that from this time forward we will be fast friends."

"You may safely bet on me," said Chase, earnestly, as Featherweight helped him to his feet. "You have rendered me a great service, and I'll never forget it. Now, let's leave here at once. I have passed a most miserable night in this locker, and I want to get out of sight of it as soon as I can. I will explain everything presently."

Featherweight knew from his companion's manner that he had some exciting revelation to make. Wondering what it could be, and impatient to hear it, he picked up his lantern and started back through the passage-way, closely followed by Chase, who kept looking back over his shoulder, as if he were afraid that there might be some one pursuing him. When they reached the ladder, and Featherweight was about to ascend to the deck, Chase caught him by his sleeve and held him back. "Be very careful," said he, in a suppressed whisper, "there may be some of them still on board, and if they see us we are done for."

"They? Who?"

"Why, Coulte and his sons. Yes, they are members of the band," added Chase, in response to an inquiring look from his companion, "and they are the ones who got me into this scrape."

"What have you done to them?"

"Nothing. They were acting under instructions from Bayard and his cousins. They attacked Wilson and me last night while we were in Mr. Gaylord's yard, and pulled me off my horse."

"Who did—Bayard and his cousins?"

"No, Coulte's boys."

While this conversation was going on the door of the cabin opened, and the four men who had been holding their consultation there came out and ascended to the deck. The moment Mr. Bell reached the top of the companion-ladder he heard the sound of voices coming from the forehatch, and his suspicions were aroused at once.

"Who's that?" he asked, turning to Coulte, who was close at his heels.

The old Frenchman, who also heard the voices, was so astonished and alarmed that he could not answer the question. He stepped cautiously to the side of the vessel and saw the yawl made fast to the bobstays. Could it be possible, he asked himself, that Bayard, instead of going ashore with the boat, as he ought to have done, had pulled around the schooner, and gone down into the hold to have another talk with the prisoner? If such was the case, his discovery by his father was certain. Mr. Bell saw from the expression of Coulte's face that there was something wrong, and ordering him and his sons in a low but stern voice, to remain perfectly quiet, he walked forward on tip-toe. Arriving at the hatchway, he looked down into the hold and saw the two boys there—Chase sitting on the lower

step of the ladder, gazing at his wrists, which were red and swollen from having been so long confined, and Featherweight standing in front of him with one hand in his pocket, and the other holding a lighted lantern. Mr. Bell was about to call out to them and demand what they were doing there, when something one of them said attracted his attention; and drawing back from the hatchway so that he could not be seen if either of the boys should chance to look toward the deck, he listened with all his ears. The first word he heard brought an expression of amazement to his face, which gradually changed to a look of intense alarm as the conversation proceeded.

"Chase," said Featherweight, "I can't make head or tail of what you are trying to tell me. Now begin at the beginning and let me know how you came here, who brought you, why you were bound and confined in that locker, and all about it."

"Do you know that there is a gang of smugglers around here, and that we see and talk to some of its members nearly every day?" asked Chase, abruptly.

"No," replied Featherweight. "I knew there was such a band somewhere on the coast, for Walter

was reading about it this morning in the paper; but I didn't know that they were so near us."

Featherweight remembered that Perk had given it as his decided opinion that, if the Sportsman's Club and Bayard and his men had come to blows on the preceding day, the Club would have whipped three of the relations of the ringleader of the band; but he did not allude to it, for he was not in the habit of repeating what was said to him by his friends. It was this quality—the ability to hold his tongue, and a very rare one it is, too—that had made Featherweight so many friends. If any of the students at the Academy wanted a trustworthy confidant, they always selected him, for he was never known to tell a secret. More than that, they could say what they pleased before him about anything or anybody, so long as they did not abuse any of his friends, and there was no danger that it would ever be repeated.

"Well, they do live near us—right here in our very midst," continued Chase; "and you are at this moment standing on board their vessel!"

"No!" exclaimed Featherweight.

"But I say, yes; you are. And now I will tell you how I came to find out about them."

Chase settled himself into an easy position on the ladder, and proceeded to give his companion a history of everything that had happened to him since he had last seen the members of the Sportsman's Club. He told how Bayard and his cousins had excited the suspicions of himself and Wilson by leaving them and going off together; how they had crept through the bushes and overheard their conversation about the smugglers, and the plans they had laid against Walter Gaylord; how Bayard, in order to get him and Wilson out of the way, had raised a quarrel with them and told them to go home; how they had waited until dark and then started for Mr. Gaylord's house, intending to see Walter and put him on his guard against Coulte and his sons; how they had been waylaid at the gate by a couple of sailors, who proved to be Pierre and Edmund; and wound up giving an account of Bayard's visit to the schooner that morning.

"From some things Bayard said when he was here," added Chase, "I have come to the conclusion that they did not intend to capture me, but mistook me for Walter. You know I ride a white horse and dress something like him, and it is very easy for one to make a mistake in the dark. Bayard

was astonished and very angry when he found me in the locker, and I heard him say to Coulte that it was none of his affair (alluding, I suppose, to my capture), and that he washed his hands of it."

"Then why didn't Coulte set you at liberty?" asked Featherweight.

"I suppose he was afraid that I would go to the village and make trouble for him," replied Chase; "and I can assure him that his fears were well founded. I am not going to be bound hand and foot and shut up in a dark hole like that for nothing; now I tell you. If I don't raise a breeze in this settlement as soon as I put my foot on shore again, it will be because I don't know how. He didn't help the matter much by keeping me a prisoner, for Wilson is at liberty, and I know he won't eat or sleep till he tells my father everything."

"And so they intended to lose Walter in the West Indies? That's a queer idea."

"I call it absurd. That boy couldn't be lost in any part of the world. He would find his way home from the North Pole. But there's another thing I want to tell you," added Chase, sinking his voice almost to a whisper, and assuming a very mysterious air which made his companion impatient

to hear what he was about to say, "and that is, that Bayard's father is the leader of this gang."

"No!" cried Featherweight again.

"It's a fact. While Bayard was talking with Coulte just outside the locker—I heard every word he said—some one whistled from the shore, and the old Frenchman declared that it was the captain. I heard a boat put off from the vessel and come back with Mr. Bell. I know it was he, because I recognised his step and also his voice. I have heard him speak a good many times during the three weeks I have been visiting at his house, and it is impossible that I should be mistaken."

"Where do you suppose he is now?" asked Featherweight, who told himself over and over again that Chase had certainly taken leave of his senses, and didn't know what he was talking about.

"He may be on board the vessel, for all I know; or he may have gone ashore with the yawl and left it where you found it. We'd better be going, too."

"I should say we had," replied Featherweight, making his way cautiously up the ladder. Although he did not believe a word of the story he had heard —he told himself it was utterly unreasonable—he

thought it best to be on the safe side, and to reconnoitre the deck before he went up there. "I am glad I have been able to do you a service, Chase," he added; "but if I had known that this craft was a smuggler, you wouldn't have caught me"——

Featherweight suddenly paused, his face grew as pale as death, and he backed down from the ladder with much greater haste than he had ascended it. While he was speaking he happened to look upward, and saw Mr. Bell leaning over the combings of the hatchway, glaring down at him like a caged hyena. He began to put a little more faith in Chase's story, now.

CHAPTER X.

THE FRIEND IN THE CORN-CRIB.

IT is hard to tell which was the most astonished and alarmed—Mr. Bell or the two boys. Chase and Featherweight stood at the foot of the ladder, looking up into the scowling, angry face that was bending over them, and Mr. Bell folded his arms and looked savagely at them in return. For fully five minntes no one spoke; but at the end of that time the leader of the smugglers seemed to have determined upon something, for he beckoned to Coulte and his sons, who came up immediately. "Go down there and tie those boys," said he. "Tie them hard and fast."

Edmund went forward after a piece of rope, and Coulte and Pierre descended the ladder, laid hold of the prisoners' collars, and held on to them without saying a word. Edmund presently came down with the rope, and in two minutes more Chase and Featherweight were powerless.

"Now come up here," said Mr. Bell, who had watched the whole of the proceeding from the head of the ladder. "I have a word to say to you."

Coulte and his sons ascended to the deck, and Mr. Bell began a conversation with them which was carried on in a tone of voice loud enough for the prisoners to hear every word that was said. Their minds were at once relieved of all apprehension on one score, for they learned that their captors did not intend to do them any bodily harm; but Mr. Bell had formed some disagreeable plans concerning them, and their hearts sank within them when they heard them unfolded and explained to Coulte and his boys.

"Now, then," said Mr. Bell, who seemed anxious to have done with what he had to say, and to get the subject off his mind as soon as possible, "I don't want any time wasted in excuses or explanations, for I know all about it. You have got yourselves and me into a nice scrape, and we must get out of it the best way we can. As you captured Chase on your own responsibility and without any orders from me, you can take care of him yourselves. The crew will begin to return very soon, and they must

not find him here. You will take him off the vessel at once—this very moment."

"But what shall we do with him?" asked Edmund.

"I don't care what you do with him, so long as you don't hurt him. I know what I shall do with Fred Craven. I shall start with him for Cuba this very night, and hire a Spanish sea captain, who trades between Havana and Vera Cruz, to ship him as a foremast-hand and take him to Mexico. I don't care what becomes of him after that. All I want is to get him out of the country until I can have time to pack up and leave for Europe. Come, Edmund, bring the yawl alongside and stand by to take your prisoner ashore, and, Coulte, while he is doing that, you and Pierre take Craven into the hold and stow him away there."

The Frenchman and his boys, who were not at all pleased with this arrangement, started off to obey the commands of their superior, and the captives, who had listened eagerly to their conversation, turned and looked at one another. "Good-by, old fellow," said Featherweight, who kept up a light heart in spite of the gloomy prospects before him.

"Do you suppose that we shall ever see each other again?"

"We will if they ever give us half a chance to get away from them," replied Chase. "They had better never take their eyes off of me. But I say, Fred, I believe I'd rather be in my boots than yours."

"I don't doubt it. You will be on shore near friends all the time, and your chances for escape or rescue will be much better than mine; for I shall be shut up in a dark hole during a voyage of six hundred miles. That's not a pleasant idea, I tell you. Suppose the schooner should go down in a storm while we are crossing the Gulf? They'd never think of coming below to release me."

"And if you reach Havana in safety, there's the Spanish sea captain," chimed in Chase. "A voyage under him will be the worst part of the whole business, according to my way of thinking. Some of these old ship-masters are so brutal. They'll knock a foremast hand down with a belaying-pin without any provocation at all. There they come—good-bye! I wish I could shake hands with you."

The appearance of Coulte and Pierre, who came down the ladder at this moment, put a stop to the

conversation. The former carried an axe in his hand and glared at Chase as if he had half a mind to use it on him; but he had brought it down there for a different purpose. He picked up the lantern, and walking around behind the ladder inserted the edge of the axe into a crack in the deck, and after a little exertion succeeded in prying open a small hatch which led down into the hold of the vessel, and which fitted into the deck so nicely that a stranger might have walked over it a hundred times without discovering it. After placing his lantern upon the deck, so that its rays would shine into the opening, the Frenchman jumped through the hatchway and held up his hands; whereupon Pierre lifted Featherweight from the deck and lowered him down into the arms of his father, who laid him away in the corner of the hold as if he had been a log of wood. This done, he carefully examined the prisoner's bands, and having looked all around to make sure that everything was right in the hold, sprang out of the opening, struck the hatch a few blows with his axe to settle it in its place, and then ascended to the deck. Featherweight heard him when he returned and carried Chase up the ladder; knew when his companion

in trouble was lowered over the side into the yawl, and also when Mr. Bell left the vessel. After that silence reigned, broken only by the footsteps of Edmund, who paced the deck above. Featherweight waited and listened for a long time, hoping that the man would come below and talk to him—anything was better than being shut up alone in that dark place—and finally stretched himself out on the boards and tried to go to sleep.

Chase, who did not possess half the courage and determination that Featherweight did, and who was inclined to look on the dark side of things, began to be lonesome and down-hearted when he found himself standing on the shore with Coulte and Pierre; and when he saw that they continued to direct angry glances toward him, as though they regarded him as the cause of all their trouble, he became alarmed, and told himself that perhaps after all he would be much safer in Featherweight's boots than in his own. His mind would have been much relieved if he had only known what his captors intended to do with him, but they did not show a disposition to enlighten him, and he was afraid to ask them any questions.

As soon as Edmund, who brought them off in the

yawl, had returned to the schooner, Coulte started on ahead to act as an advance guard, and to give warning, in case he saw any one approaching, while Pierre busied himself in untying Chase's feet so that he could walk. After that he took his prisoner's arm and conducted him through the woods until they reached a well-beaten bridle-path, leading from the cove to Coulte's plantation, which was about four miles distant. At the end of an hour's rapid walk they arrived within sight of the clearing, and discovered the old Frenchman standing on the porch in front of the house waiting for them. He was on the lookout, and when Pierre came into view he waved his hat as a signal for him to approach.

"When a man is engaged in business of this kind, he can't be too particular," said Pierre, now speaking for the first time since he left the schooner. "There may be some of your friends around here, for all I know, and if they should see me marching you up to the house with your hands bound behind your back, they would suspect something; so I will untie you, but I wouldn't advise you to try any tricks."

Chase had not the least intention of trying any

tricks, for he was too completely cowed. While Pierre was untying his hands, he looked all around in the hope of seeing some friend approaching; but, with the exception of the old Frenchman, there was no one in sight. For all that, however, there was somebody near who saw all Pierre's movements, and understood the meaning of them. Chase passed within ten feet of him, when he walked to the porch where Coulte was standing, the concealed friend watching him closely, and mentally resolving that he would seize the very first opportunity to make a demonstration in his favor.

Chase had passed many a happy hour under the old Frenchman's roof. In company with Bayard Bell and his cousins he had eaten more than one good dinner there, and had spent whole evenings listening to the stories of Coulte's hunting adventures; but he had never entered the house under circumstances like these, nor had he ever before met with so cold a reception. The Frenchman did not take his pipe out of his mouth, give a long whistle, indicative of pleasure, and exclaim in his broken English, "I been glad to zee you, Meester Shase," as he usually did, but followed him sullenly into the house, and without saying a word

began to tie him—an operation in which he was assisted by Pierre. When this had been done, he picked up a lighted candle that stood on the table, raised a trap-door in one corner of the room, and descended a flight of rickety steps that led into the cellar, closely followed by Pierre, who carried Chase on his shoulders. The prisoner was laid upon the floor in a dark corner, and then the Frenchman and his son ascended to the room above and sat down to smoke their pipes, and talk the matter over. Their conversation came plainly to Chase's ears through the wide cracks in the floor, and through the trap-door which they had left open, and, although it was carried on in the French language, he understood every word of it.

"Well," said Pierre, after a long pause, "what's to be done? Have you thought of anything?"

"I have," replied his father. "We'll adopt Mr. Bell's plan, only we'll have to carry it out on a smaller scale. He's going to take his prisoner to Cuba; but as we have no boat large enough to make so long a journey, we'll have to take ours to Lost Island, and leave him there."

"Why, that's only forty miles away!" exclaimed Pierre.

"That's plenty far enough. He can't swim that distance; there's nothing on the island that he can make a boat of; he will be out of the path of vessels going to and from New Orleans, and I'd like to know how he will reach the main shore again. He'll stay there three or four days at any rate, and that's all we want. By the end of that time we will have sold off our property, and taken ourselves safe out of the country; for, of course, we can't stay here any longer. If he gets back in time to upset some of Mr. Bell's plans, why, that's no business of ours."

"But how can we go to the island without a vessel."

"We've got as good a vessel as we want. We'll go in the pirogue. We'll have to take care that the boy doesn't freeze or starve to death before he is taken off the island," continued Coulte, "and so we will give him an axe, a flint and steel, a blanket or two, and provisions enough to last him a week. When they are gone he must look out for himself."

Another long pause followed, during which Pierre was evidently thinking over the plan his father had proposed. Chase thought it over too, and the longer he pondered upon it, the more earnestly he

hoped that Pierre would find some serious objection to it, for it did not suit him at all. In the first place, there was the voyage of forty miles in the pirogue, the bare thought of which was enough to make Chase's hair stand on end. The pirogue was a large canoe capable of holding about twenty men. It was furnished with a sail and centre-board, and before a light wind could run, as the students used to say, "like a scared deer." She had considerable breadth of beam for a vessel of that description, and could not be easily overturned; but still she was not the craft that Chase, if he had been allowed to have his own way, would have selected for a voyage of forty miles across the Gulf, especially at that season of the year. There were not many chances in a thousand that she would accomplish the journey in safety.

In the next place there was the prospect of a lonely residence on the island, and that, under the existing circumstances, was by no means a pleasant thing to look forward to. Lost Island was a most inhospitable place. No one lived on it, and Chase had never heard of a vessel stopping there. It was low and sandy, and in calm weather there were perhaps a thousand acres of it out of water; but

during a storm the waves washed all over the lower end of it, leaving in sight only a solitary bluff, about a hundred feet high, which was the only spot on the island that was covered with timber. Like most boys of his age, Chase had read and admired Robinson Crusoe, and if his captors had only given him a gun, plenty of ammunition, and a companion like his friend Wilson or the jolly little Featherweight, he would have had no objections to imitating that adventurer's manner of life for a short time. There would be something romantic in it, and they would have so much to talk about when they came back! But to be put off there by himself in the dead of winter, with only a week's provisions, and a fair prospect of starving to death when the supply was exhausted, was a different matter altogether. He could see no fun or romance in that, and he didn't want to go to Lost Island! but Pierre evidently thought it just the place for him, for, after turning the matter over in his mind for some minutes, he said to his father:

"Your plan is the best that could be adopted. We'll start this very night, and we'll go down now and put the pirogue in the water and get every

thing ready. I will go after the sail and oars, and you can lock up the house."

Pierre left the cabin, and his father raised the trap-door and went down into the cellar to take another look at the prisoner. He tightened up a little on the ropes with which he was confined, and when he went out of the cellar he piled the bureau, table and all the chairs upon the door so that it could not be raised from below. Having thus, as he thought, put it out of Chase's power to ascend out of the cellar, even if he succeeded in freeing his hands and feet, Coulte locked the door of the house and joined Pierre, who stood with a sail on one shoulder and a pair of oars on the other, ready to start for the bayou where the pirogue lay.

Pierre little dreamed how near he came to discovering something, while he was securing the sail and oars that belonged to the pirogue. They were kept in one of the corn-cribs—a log building about twenty feet long and fifteen feet high, which was filled with corn in the ear to a level with the eaves. A ladder on the outside of the building led up to a small door ten feet from the ground. As Pierre mounted this ladder he was surprised to see that the door, which he was always careful to keep

closed, was ajar; and when he reached in to get the sail he found that, instead of being rolled up as it was when he left it, it was spread out over the corn. He thought, too, that the sail had increased wonderfully in weight since the last time he handled it, for it was all he could do to pull it out of the crib. But he got it at last, and the oars too; and after closing and fastening the door he backed down the ladder to the ground.

No sooner had the sound of his footsteps died away than a boy, who was snugly hidden among the corn, lifted a very pale face and turned it towards the door, and after picking up his hat, which had been knocked off his head by the sail when Pierre drew it out of the crib, cautiously raised himself to a sitting posture, and waited to recover from the fright he had sustained. He listened intently all the while, and having satisfied himself at last that Pierre did not intend to return to the crib, he crept carefully over the corn to the opposite end of the building, and, looking out between the logs, saw him and his father disappear in the woods on the opposite side of the clearing.

"Now, that's what I call a close shave," said he, drawing a long breath. "I'd give something to

know what they would have done with me if they had found me here. That fellow who pulled the sail off me is one of those who attacked us last night in Mr. Gaylord's yard. I know him, if he hasn't got his pea-jacket and tarpaulin on. I wonder where they are going, and whether or not they will be away long enough for me to do something for Chase.

It was Leonard Wilson who spoke. Instead of riding straight for Bellville, as Chase hoped and believed he would, he had loitered about in the woods all night, turning over in his mind a hundred wild schemes for assisting his distressed friend, and at no time had he been more than five miles away from him.

The last we saw of Wilson, he was riding down the road post-haste, eager to put a safe distance between himself and the double-barrelled pistol that one of Chase's captors drew from his pocket. After he had run his horse a few hundred yards it occurred to him that he was exhibiting anything but a courageous spirit by deserting his companion in that inglorious manner, when he had a gun slung at his back, both barrels of which were heavily loaded with buckshot. As this thought passed

through his mind, he pulled up his horse with a jerk, and being determined to make same amends for his cowardly behavior, faced about and went tearing down the road towards the gate, unslinging and cocking his gun as he went. It was his intention to ride boldly into the yard, level his double-barrel at the heads of Chase's assailants, and demand his immediate release; but the plan was conceived a little too late in the day to be successfully carried out; for when he reached the gate, he found that both Chase and his captors had disappeared.

"Never mind," soliloquized Wilson, who thought that he understood the matter as well as though it had been explained to him; "I am not beaten yet. Those two fellows are Coulte's boys, and they have made a mistake and captured Chase instead of Walter Gaylord. But they shan't keep him long. Bayard said yesterday that Coulte is very much afraid of the law, and I'll test the truth of that assertion the first thing to-morrow morning. If I catch the old fellow by himself, I will tell him if he doesn't have Chase set at liberty, I will lodge him in jail in less than two hours. I ought to go to his house this very night, and I would, if I were not

afraid that I should find his boys there. I should not dare to threaten them for fear they might not scare as easily as the old man."

While these thoughts were passing through Wilson's mind he was riding along the road toward the residence of the old Frenchman, still closely followed by Chase's horse, which galloped after him like a dog. He approached as near the house as he dared, and then halted in a little ravine and set about making himself comfortable for the night. He started a fire with the flint and steel he always carried in the pocket of his shooting-jacket, built a blind to protect him from the cold north wind that was blowing, hobbled the horses and turned them loose in the cane to graze, and after collecting a supply of fire-wood, sufficient to last until morning, he scraped together a pile of leaves to serve as a bed, pulled his overcoat over him and tried to go to sleep. But that was a matter of some difficulty. The recollections of the exciting events of the day, and his anxiety concerning the success of his plans for effecting Chase's release, banished sleep for the better part of the night, and it was four o'clock before he closed his eyes.

He awoke just as the sun was rising, and as soon

as his eyes were fairly open he was on his feet making preparations for visiting the old Frenchman's house. He pulled on his overcoat, slung his gun over his shoulder, and stood for some minutes looking first at his saddle and bridle which lay on the ground near him, and then toward the cane, where he could hear his horse browsing, debating in his mind whether he had better ride or walk. He finally decided on the latter course. His first care must be to ascertain whether or not Coulte was at home, and if so if he was alone; and, in order to accomplish this, he must approach as near the cabin as he could without being discovered. If he went on horseback, he would certainly be seen by any one who might happen to be in the house before he was half way across the clearing; but if he went on foot, he could make use of every tree and stump to cover his approach. Having settled this point, Wilson set off at a brisk walk, and in half an hour more was concealed in one of the old Frenchman's corn-cribs waiting to see what would turn up. He found the house deserted, Coulte having started off at the first peep of day to visit the schooner, and ascertain how his boys

have succeeded in their efforts to capture Walter Gaylord.

"I don't know where the old fellow has gone," said Wilson to himself, taking up a position in the crib from which he could see every part of the house, "but there is one thing certain, and that is that he can't remain away for ever. I'll stay here and wait for him. If he comes back alone I will go out and speak to him; but if his boys come with him I'll keep close. The wind blows cold through these cracks, but this sail will serve me as an extra overcoat."

Wilson covered himself up with the sail, and for the next two hours remained quiet in his concealment, awaiting the old Frenchman's return and wondering where he was, and why he stayed away so long. Coulte made his appearance at last, and he came alone, too; but his actions indicated that there was some one behind him whom he was expecting every moment. He walked nervously up and down the porch, stopping every moment or two to gaze at the woods and to run his eyes suspiciously around the clearing, as if fearful that there might be some one approaching whom he did not care to see. Wilson, whose curiosity was aroused, began to

watch the woods also, and presently discovered Pierre and Chase approaching. He kept his gaze fastened on them as they walked past the corn-crib into the house, and when Coulte and his son, after confining Chase in the cellar, seated themselves in the doorway to hold their consultation, Wilson listened eagerly, and was greatly disappointed because he was too far off to hear what they said. He was frightened, indeed, when he saw Pierre arise from his seat and approach the crib, but supposing that he wanted some corn for his horse, and that when he got it he would go away again, he drew the sail over his head and held fast to it to keep the wind from blowing it off. Pierre seized the mast and gave a pull at the sail, but could not start it.

"What's the matter here?" he growled, twisting the mast about and turning it over as if he thought it had caught against the side of the crib.

"If I let go and he lifts up the sail, it will be all over with me," soliloquized Wilson; and the thought frightened him, and he held on with more determination than ever. "Why don't he get his corn and clear out?"

But Pierre wanted something besides corn. He

wanted the sail, and he was determined to have it, too. After a few unsuccessful attempts to lift it from the corn he grew surprised and angry, and throwing all his strength into his arms he gave a quick jerk and pulled the canvas out of Wilson's grasp. The latter gave himself up for lost, and was very much amazed as well as relieved when he heard Pierre close the door and go back down the ladder. He could scarcely realize that he had escaped, until he saw him and his father disappear in the woods on their way to the bayou where the pirogue lay.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SIEGE.

"I'VE learned something," said Wilson, as soon as he had satisfied himself that Pierre and his father had really left the clearing; "and that is that a Creole can't see after twelve o'clock. I can't account for his blindness in any other way. Now, the next thing is to find Chase. He's somewhere in that house, and I will get him out if I have to burn it over his head."

Talking thus to himself, Wilson scrambled over the corn to the door, and there encountered an obstacle. The door was fastened on the outside with a hasp and a wooden pin, and the openings between the logs were so narrow that he could not get his arm through to take the pin out. After several ineffectual attempts to reach the fastenings, he threw himself flat on his back and sent both his heavy boots against the door with all his strength; but finding that it resisted his efforts, and that he was

wasting his breath to no purpose, he jumped up and turned his attention to the roof. The rafters, which were saplings three inches in diameter, were placed about two feet apart and covered with narrow oak boards, laid on like shingles, and held in position by small nails. A few determined kicks scattered the boards right and left; and when he had made an opening sufficiently large to admit his shoulders, he thrust his head out and looked about him. He could see nobody (that, however, was no evidence that there was no one in sight), and believing that his movements were unobserved, he clambered out of the opening, slid down the roof to the eaves, and dropped to the ground. A few hasty steps brought him to the porch, and a few more to the wide hall which ran through the building. He did not waste time in trying the door, for he knew that Coulte had locked it and put the key in his pocket, but ran at once to a ladder which led to a loft over one of the rooms. Ascending to the top with the agility of a squirrel, he threw off one of the loose boards which formed the floor of the loft, and looked down into the room below. When his eyes rested on the articles that had been piled on the trap-door, he knew where to look for his friend.

"I say!" he cried, in a suppressed, hot, excited tone of voice.

"Say it yourself," was the answer which came faintly to his ears. "I knew you would never lesert me, old fellow. I am glad to see you."

Chase had not yet seen his friend, but he did see him a few minutes afterward, for Wilson no sooner heard his voice coming from the cellar than he dropped into the room as lightly as a cat, and began throwing Coulte's furniture about in the most reckless manner. He broke a leg off the table, smashed a chair or two, upset the bureau, scattering its contents over the floor, and having cleared the trap-door, he slammed it back against the wall, and went down the rickety stairs in two jumps.

"Speak up, Chase," said he. "It's as dark as a stack of black cats down here."

"This way," replied the prisoner. "Take it easy, and don't knock your brains out against the beams overhead. We've plenty of time, for Coulte and Pierre won't be back for two hours. They've gone down to the bayou to launch the pirogue, and get it ready to take me to Lost Island to-night."

"Eh!" exclaimed Wilson, in great amazement.

"Were they going to carry you to sea in a dug-out?"

"Certainly. It was their intention to run me off to the island and leave me there until they could have time to pack up and move to some other country. That isn't the most surprising thing I have to tell you, either. What did you come here for?"

It was no wonder that Chase expressed a little curiosity on this point, for Wilson's actions did not indicate that he had come there for any purpose in particular. He stood with his hands in his pockets, looking down through the darkness in the direction from which Chase's voice came, but he did not make any move to release him. He was thinking of the proposed voyage in the pirogue, and wondering if the old Frenchman and his son were really reckless enough to attempt it. The question propounded by his friend brought him to his senses, however, and in a few seconds more the prisoner was standing erect, and Wilson was shaking his hand as though he had not met him for years.

"We'll not stay here another instant," said Chase, hurriedly. "This is the second time that my liberty has been restored to me to-day, and now

I intend to make use of it. Do you know anything about my horse?"

"I left him in the canebrakes with mine, not a quarter of a mile from here. We'll be in the saddle, and on our way home in less than fifteen minutes. Is there anything to eat in this house?"

"Plenty of it. Coulte always keeps his larder well supplied."

"I wonder if he would raise any objections to our eating a loaf or two of his bread, and drinking three or four pans of milk? I'm hungry. I haven't tasted a mouthful since we ate lunch yesterday."

"Neither have I. We don't care whether he objects or not. He got us into this scrape, and he certainly ought to feed us."

The boys had by this time reached the top of the cellar-stairs, and after slamming down the door as if they meant to burst it off its hinges, they made a movement toward the cupboard. The sight that met their eyes as they opened the door was a most welcome one to them. There was bread, meat and milk in abundance, and in a remarkably short space of time the hungry boys had completely cleared some of the shelves. They kept both hands employed—one in crowding the food into their

mouths, and the other in transferring it from the cupboard to the pockets of their shooting-jackets, listening the while with all their ears, and trembling with anxiety lest Coulte or Pierre should steal a march on them and return before they knew it. After they had laid in a bountiful supply of bread and meat, and made way with a pan of milk, they were ready to leave the house; but just then Wilson suddenly ceased the working of his jaws, turned his head on one side for a moment, and held up his finger warningly. Chase looked his surprise; he could not say a word, for his mouth was too full.

"I heard a step in the hall," whispered Wilson, as soon as he could speak.

"It can't be possible," said Chase, in the same cautious whisper. "Coulte hasn't had time to get half way to the bayou yet."

"I don't care, he's out there; or somebody is, for I know I heard a stealthy foot-fall."

The boys held their breath and listened, but the sound that had attracted Wilson's attention was not repeated. That, however, was not enough to convince him that he had been mistaken, and after looking about the room for a moment, and up at

the opening through which he had come down from the loft, he dropped the bread and meat with which his hands were filled, and made a sign to Chase. The latter, comprehending his friend's design, took his stand under the opening, with his face to the partition, and in a moment more Wilson was perched upon his shoulders, looking over into the hall. As his head appeared above the opening, he was certain that he saw some one spring around a corner of the building out of sight. He kept his eyes fastened on the spot where the figure had disappeared, and after the lapse of two or three minutes saw the top of a boy's hat thrust slowly and cautiously into view. Wilson quickly ducked his own head, but not in time to escape discovery.

"It's he, as sure as the world!" exclaimed a familiar voice.

Wilson, finding that he had been recognised, looked over into the hall again, and boldly faced the unwelcome visitor. "Ah! my young friend," said he, "is that you?"

"That's what's the matter," replied the boy. "You're just the fellow we are looking for—the dentical fellow."

"You're sure of it, are you? Well, now that

you have found me, what are you going to do about it?"

"We haven't quite made up our minds yet. We'll tell you in a few minutes."

"How are our friends, the smugglers, this fine morning; and how does Walter Gaylord feel since Coulte's boys made a prisoner of him? I say! That little plan of yours didn't work as smoothly as it might, did it?"

These words seemed to enrage the boy, who began looking about for some missile to throw at Wilson. The latter looked fiercely at him for a moment, during which time two more boys came around the corner of the building and entered the hall, and then swung himself off Chase's shoulders and dropped to the floor. "What's to be done now?" he whispered. "There are Bayard Bell and his cousins."

The last time we saw Bayard, he and Seth and Will were diving into the bushes to conceal themselves from Featherweight, who was approaching them at a rapid gallop. They had barely time to hide behind a log in the thicket before he came up. They saw him open his eyes in astonishment when he discovered the schooner, and watched him closely

while he hitched his horse, stepped into the yawl, and pushed off to visit her. Every one of them regarded his appearance there at that particular time as a most unfortunate occurrence, and they would have been glad to prevent him from going on board the vessel, had it not been for the fear of raising a disturbance with him and thus attracting the attention of Mr. Bell.

"Everything is going wrong," said Bayard, angrily. "We ought to be off now hunting for Wilson, but here's another spy that demands our attention. Why did he come here where he isn't wanted?"

"He'll certainly be discovered," remarked Seth.

"And if he isn't, we'll catch him when he comes ashore," said Bayard. "He will learn some things he ought not to know, and it will never do to let him go back to his friends. I'll just creep up through the bushes and catch his horse."

This was easier said than done. The pony was a vicious little fellow, and did not care to have any one except his master approach him. When he discovered Bayard advancing upon him through the thicket he laid back his ears as if to warn him that he had come near enough; and when the boy arose

to his feet and extended his hand to seize him by the bridle, the pony faced about, kicked at him with both heels, broke his halter, and scampered away to carry consternation among the members of the Sportsman's Club, who were already growing weary at the non-appearance of their jolly little Secretary. Bayard returned to his companions, grumbling over his failure, and seating himself beside them in the bushes, waited to see what was going to happen on board the schooner. Nor was he obliged to wait long, for before the next quarter of an hour had passed away the events we have already described had taken place; Coulte and Pierre had gone ashore with Chase; and Mr. Bell had also left the vessel and started for home. Nothing more was seen of Featherweight, and Will declared that that was evidence enough that he had been discovered and retained as a prisoner.

"I think so too," said Bayard, with a long sigh of relief. "He is out of the way, but there is one left, and that is Wilson. He must be secured at all hazards, and that too before he reaches the village."

"But what shall we do with him when we get him?" asked Seth. "We've no place to keep him."

"Let's catch him first, and talk about that afterward," replied Bayard. "I am more than ever interested in the welfare of this band, now that I know that my father is connected with it. That gets ahead of me completely, for I never dreamed of such a thing."

Bayard and his cousins, being eager to begin the pursuit, did not linger to talk this matter over, but made the best of their way toward the ravine where they had left their horses. After they had mounted, the question arose: which way should they go to find Wilson? Considerable time was consumed in debating this point, but it was finally decided that the only thing they could do was to ride along the road toward the village. If Wilson had not already gone there, they would certainly intercept him by following this course; but if he had reached the town and spread the alarm, why then the mischief was done and could not be undone. They would then go to Mr. Bell and let him decide what steps should be taken next. This being settled, they started off at a rapid gallop, which they kept up until they had entered the old Frenchman's clearing and were half way across it, and then Bayard, who was leading the way, suddenly pulled up his

horse and pointed toward the house. His cousins looked in the direction indicated just in time to see a boy, who looked very much like the one of whom they were in search, drop down from a corn-crib and run into the hall.

"There he is!" exclaimed Bayard, gleefully. "We're all right now. He hasn't been to the village at all, and consequently has told no one of our secret."

"How do you know that?" asked Will, who thought his cousin rather hasty in forming his conclusions.

"Why, he's here alone, isn't he? If he had visited any of the settlers and told them what he heard us say yesterday, and what happened last night in Mr. Gaylord's yard, some of them would have been here with him. I feed greatly encouraged. Let's surround the house and capture him."

"And if we come to close quarters with him, be careful to keep out of the way of his fists," added Will. "He's as strong as a horse, and he isn't afraid of anything."

Bayard waved his hands right and left, and his cousins separated and dismounted on opposite sides of the house. After hitching their horses they

entered the hall on tiptoe just as the fugitives had finished their raid on the old Frenchman's eatables, and were discovered in the manner we have described.

"Fellows," whispered Bayard, when Wilson had dropped back into the room after holding the short colloquy we have recorded, "there's some one in there with him, for I can hear them talking. It's Chase, I'll bet a dollar." Then raising his voice he called out: "You were getting ready to leave, were you? It seems we arrived just in time. We've got you both right where we want you. We'll teach you to play eavesdropper before we are done with you."

Chase and Wilson made no reply to this. The latter, who did not intend to be cheated out of his dinner, even if there were enemies almost within reach of him, once more picked up his bread and meat, and while he was devouring it ran his eyes all around the room as if searching for some avenue of escape.

"You needn't keep so still in there," continued Bayard in a louder tone. "We know just how the thing stands."

"Well, what of it?" demanded Chase. "What do you propose to do about it?"

"Ah! my young boy, I thought you were there," cried Bayard, recognising Chase's voice. "We don't intend to do much. We'll just keep you in that room till Coulte comes home—that's all."

"We'd like to see you do it," replied Wilson, angrily. "We're coming out now, and if any of you stand in our way you'll get hurt. We don't want anything more to do with you, and you will save yourselves trouble by going off and minding your own business."

As Wilson said this he and Chase once more laid down their bread and meat, and began making preparations to leave the room.

As the door was locked and Coulte had the key in his pocket, there was but one way this could be done, and that was by going out at the hole in the floor of the loft where Wilson had come in. Their first move was to restore the bureau to an upright position and pull it under the hole; and their next to spring upon the top of it, settle their hats firmly on their heads, push back their sleeves, and make other demonstrations indicative of a resolve to give

Bayard and his cousins a warm reception if they dared to attack them.

"I will go first," said Wilson. "I know they will pitch into me the moment I touch the floor, but I am good for two of them if you will manage the other."

"Trust me for that," said Chase.

"Be ready to follow me without the loss of an instant," continued Wilson, earnestly. "Strike right and left, and don't be at all particular where you hit. As soon as we have beaten them off we'll run for our horses."

While these preparations were being made on the inside of the room, Bayard was equally busy on the outside. His ears kept him posted in all that was going on on the other side of the partition, and when he heard Chase and Wilson moving the bureau across the floor, he knew what they intended to do, and set to work at once to defeat their designs.

"Our only chance is to keep them in that room until Coulte returns," said he, to his cousins. "If we allow them to come out they will give us more than we can attend to, for they are well nigh

desperate. Seth, run to the crib and bring us an armful of corn."

"What for?" asked that worthy.

"Why, to throw at them, of course. Be quick, now."

Seth hurried off and presently returned with two or three dozen ears of corn, which he deposited on the floor of the hall. Bayard and Will caught up an ear in each hand, and placing themselves in favorable positions for throwing, waited for one of the boys on the other side of the partition to show himself.

"Better keep close in there," said Bayard, when he heard Chase and Wilson push the bureau against the wall and spring upon it. "We're ready for you, and if you know when you are well off you won't try to come out."

"Who asked for your advice?" demanded Chase. "We are coming, and when we get out into that hall we don't want to find you there."

"We'll be in Bellville in about four hours," chimed in Wilson; "and when we get there won't we have a nice story to tell about you? My eye! I wouldn't be in your place for a whole cart-load of money."

"You're not in Bellville yet," replied Bayard, in a voice that was rendered almost indistinct with passion. "Keep down, I say. We give you fair warning that the first one who shows himself will get his head broken."

Wilson, not in the least daunted by this threat, seized the uppermost log of the partition with both hands, and began scrambling out of the hole; but scarcely had the top of his hat appeared in view when three heavy ears of corn, propelled with all the force that sinewy arms could give them, shot up from below—one passing within an inch of his head, another knocking off his hat, and a third striking him on the shoulder and sending him back into the room. He landed on his feet on the bureau, but would have fallen if Chase had not caught him in his arms.

"Are you hurt?" asked the latter, in alarm.

"Not in the least, only astonished," replied his companion. "They are too sharp to allow us to come to close quarters with them. I didn't think they would resort to a trick like that, and I am satisfied now that we can't go out that way. I would as soon face bullets as those ears of corn. We must try strategy."

"And we must be in a hurry about it, too," replied Chase, "for we have already wasted a good deal of valuable time. Coulte may return at any moment."

"We're in a bad scrape," said Wilson, beginning to get discouraged.

"Yes, we are; but still we are better off than Fred Craven. He's in a fix, I tell you; and he got into it by trying to help me. He's a prisoner on board——"

A single word we utter, or an act that we perform, is sometimes recalled to our minds when we least expect it, and not unfrequently makes great changes in our prospects for the future. Chase did not have time to say any more about the prisoner he had left on board the schooner, but what little he did say was remembered by Wilson, who afterward repeated it to one who instantly became interested in Chase's welfare, and succeeded in getting him out of the worst predicament he had ever got into. He was going to tell how he had met Featherweight, and to repeat all that had passed between them, when Bayard called out:

"You haven't started for Bellville yet, have you? I think it will be a long time before you

will have a chance to tell those stories about us. Hollo, here! You're just in time."

A heavy step sounded in the hall, and some one growled out in reply to Bayard's salutation:

"Hollo yourself! What are you doing in this house? I've seen enough of you, and you had better make yourselves scarce about here, sudden."

"That's Pierre," whispered Chase, in great alarm. "We're done for now."

Yes, it was Pierre. When he reached the bayou he found that the pirogue was in need of some repairs. Long exposure to the sun had opened wide seams in her sides, and these must be caulked before she was put into the water. Pierre at once returned to the house to get the necessary implements, and arrived there just in time to be of assistance to Bayard and his cousins. The fugitives were dismayed when they heard his voice. They stood irresolute for a moment, and then began running about the room, moving with cautious footsteps, and darting from side to side like a couple of rats cornered in an oat-bin. They heard a few words of the conversation that was carried on in the hall, but they were too nearly overcome with

terror, and too completely absorbed in their desire to escape, to pay much attention to it.

"If you knew what an important service we have just rendered you, you wouldn't be in such a hurry to order us to make ourselves scarce about here," said Bayard, addressing himself to Pierre. "You left a prisoner here, didn't you?"

"What of him?" demanded Pierre, and this time he spoke in a very different tone of voice. "Have you seen him? Has he escaped?"

"Do you remember the fellow you allowed to go at liberty last night when you captured Chase?" continued Bayard. "Well, he has been hanging around here watching you; and a few minutes ago he came into the house, tore a hole in the floor of the loft—"

"Where is he now?" interrupted Pierre, who did not like Bayard's roundabout way of getting at things.

"He's in that room, and so is Chase. They would have come out and made off if it hadn't been for us; but we drove them back by throwing corn at them."

Before Bayard had finished his explanation Pierre was trying to force an entrance into the

room. He produced a key from his pocket and unlocked the door, but it refused to open for him, for it was securely fastened on the inside by a heavy hickory poker, one end of which had been placed under the lock, and the other firmly braced against the floor.

"Open here!" shouted Pierre, "or it will be worse for you when I get inside."

No answer was returned, and Pierre, filled with rage, began trying to burst the door open by placing his brawny shoulders against it and pushing with all his strength, and then kicking it with his heavy boots; but his efforts were useless, and he finally desisted and turned his eyes toward the ladder that led toward the loft.

"Don't try to go in that way," said Bayard. "They are plucky fellows, and they would throw something at you the moment you showed your face above the partition. Cut the door down."

Pierre thought this good advice. He hurried out of the hall and presently returned with an axe, with which he attacked the door furiously. The hinges held, and so did the lock; but the inside of the door gave way, and in a few seconds Pierre had cut a hole large enough to admit him into the room.

He cautiously thrust his head into it, but could see no one. He reconnoitred the interior thoroughly, and finally, with an exclamation of amazement, worked his way hastily through the opening. There was the broken furniture which the boys had scattered about the room, the open cupboard with the empty shelves, and the bread and meat they had left behind them; but the boys themselves were nowhere to be seen.

CHAPTER XII.

HOW WILSON ESCAPED.

BAYARD and his cousins squeezed themselves through the hole in the door, one after the other, all of them revolving in their minds some tantalizing remarks they intended to address to Chase and Wilson when they saw them; and the surprise and bewilderment they exhibited when they found the room empty, were quite equal to Pierre's. The latter, after looking all about the apartment to make sure that the boys were not there, lighted a candle, threw open the trap-door, and dived into the cellar, where he spent some time in overturning the boxes and barrels that were stowed around the walls; and when he came out again the expression his face wore was a sufficient indication that his search had been fruitless.

"Now, see here," said he, looking savagely at Bayard; "what sort of a story is this you have been telling me?"

"I told you the truth," replied the boy, retreating hastily toward the door as Pierre advanced upon him. "Wilson was certainly in this room, because we all saw him when he made an attempt to climb out of that hole in the loft. Look around a little. He's here, I know he is."

Pierre, who believed that Bayard was trying to mislead him for some purpose of his own, and who had been on the point of giving him a good shaking with a view of forcing the real facts of the case out of him, looked toward the other boys for a confirmation of this story. Seth and Will loudly protested that their cousin had told the truth, and nothing but the truth, and Pierre, being in some measure convinced by their earnestness, lifted the table from the floor, and after pushing it against the wall to enable it to retain an upright position, placed his candle upon it, and set to work to give the apartment a thorough overhauling.

"If they were in the room when I reached the house, they must be here now," said he, "for there is no way for them to get out except through the door and that hole in the loft. Move everything, and we'll find them."

Suiting the action to the word, Pierre seized one

of the beds, and pulled it into the middle of the floor, and there, snugly hidden behind a pile of saddles, old blankets, boots, hats, boxes, and a variety of other articles that had been thrown under the couch for safe keeping, was Henry Chase. Pierre had looked under that same bed when he first came in; but as it was dark in the room—there being no windows in the house—and his examination had been hastily made, Chase had escaped his observation.

"Here's one of them!" exclaimed Pierre, seizing the fugitive by the collar and lifting him to his feet.

"What did we tell you?" cried Bayard. "Are you satisfied now that we knew what we were talking about?"

"Where's the other fellow—what's his name?' demanded Pierre.

"Wilson," suggested Seth.

"I'm sure I don't know where he is," answered Chase, and he told the truth. Just before he dived under the bed, he saw Wilson running frantically about the room as if he did not know which way to turn, but where he went, Chase had not the remotest

idea. "And if I did know I wouldn't tell you,' he added, boldly.

"You *do* know," exclaimed Bayard. "He was in this room with you not five minutes ago."

"I don't deny that, but still I don't know where he is. O, you may strike me, if you feel so inclined," added Chase, as Pierre drew back his clenched hand, "but I can't tell you a thing I don't know, can I?"

"Bring me something to tie him with," said Pierre, turning to Bayard; "one of those bridles will do. We'll make sure of him, now that we have got him, and then look for the other."

Bayard brought the bridle with alacrity, and even assisted in confining Chase's arms, the latter submitting to the operation without even a show of resistance. Pierre used more than usual care in making the straps fast, and when he had bound the boy so tightly that he could scarcely move a finger, he pulled a chair into the middle of the room and pushed him into it. His short experience with his prisoner had convinced him that he was a very slippery fellow, and he thought it best to have him where he could keep his eyes upon him.

As soon as Chase had been disposed of, the

search for Wilson was renewed, Bayard and his cousins lending willing aid. They began by examining every nook and corner of the cellar, and not finding him there, they returned to the room above and pulled the beds to pieces, explored the loft, and looked into all sorts of impossible places, even peering under chairs, and taking out the bureau drawers; and finally, one after another, they made a journey to the fire-place and looked up the chimney. But they could see nothing there. There was a fire on the hearth, and the smoke ascended in such volumes that it speedily filled their eyes and nostrils, and they were glad to draw back into the room for a breath of fresh air. Chase sat in his chair watching all their movements with the deepest interest. His friend's sudden and mysterious disappearance astonished and perplexed him as much as it did anybody; but he exulted over it, while Pierre and his young assistants seemed to be very much dismayed, especially the former. After the house had been thoroughly searched (even the apartment across the hall was examined, although there was not the least probability that Wilson could have got into it), Pierre walked once or twice across the room, and then taking down a

hunting-horn from its nail over the fire-place, went to the door and blew it as if he meant that it should be heard by everybody for ten miles around. When he came back he addressed himself rather sternly to Bayard.

"Now, then, clear out," said he. "Be off at once, and never let me see your face again."

"What are you going to do with Chase, and what were you blowing that horn for?" asked Bayard, who thought it might be policy to learn something of Pierre's plans before he left him.

"That's my own business," was the gruff reply. "Do you see that hole in the wall? It was left there for folks to go out of, and I advise you to make use of it."

Pierre pointed toward the door, and Bayard, judging by the expression of his countenance that it would be a dangerous piece of business to irritate him by refusing to comply with his wishes, sprang out into the hall, followed by his cousins.

"That's the return we get for doing him a favor," said he, as he led the way toward the place where their horses were tied. "However, I don't mind it much, for Chase is captured again, and if we can only secure Wilson we are all right.

As he is not in the house, it follows as a thing of course that he must be out of it; although how he got out is a mystery to me. He has taken to the woods, most likely, and if we start after him at once we can catch him."

Bayard and his cousins mounted their horses and rode off at a gallop. Pierre watched them until they were out of sight, and then went into the house and renewed his search for Wilson, which he kept up until he was interrupted by a hasty step in the hall, and Coulte appeared and looked through the broken door. He had heard the sound of the hunting-horn, and knowing from the peculiar manner in which it was blown, that there was something unusual going on at the house, he had hurried back to see what was the matter. A single glance at the inside of the room and at his son's face, was enough to tell him that the latter had some exciting news to communicate.

"Oh! Whew! Somedings is going wrong again!" he exclaimed, in a frightened tone.

Pierre replied that there were a good many things going wrong, and in a few hurried words made him acquainted with all that had happened in the house during the last fifteen minutes, adding a piece of

information and prediction that greatly alarmed Coulte, namely: that Wilson had again escaped, and that in less than an hour he would return to the clearing with an army of settlers at his heels. The old Frenchman listened eagerly to his son's story, only interrupting him with long-drawn whistles, which were loud and frequent, and when it was finished declared that it was necessary to make a change in their plans—that, instead of waiting until night to begin the voyage to Lost Island, they must begin it at once. They would sail down the bayou into the swamp, conceal themselves there until dark, and then continue their journey. What they would do after they had disposed of their prisoner, Coulte said he did not know; but of one thing he was satisfied, and that was, that they could not return to the settlement to sell their property, as they had intended to do. They had worked hard far it, but they must give it up now, for it would probably be confiscated when the authorities learned that he and his sons belonged to the smugglers. This thought seemed to drive the old Frenchman to the verge of distraction. He paced up and down the floor with his beloved pipe tightly clenched between his teeth, swinging his arms wildly about his

head, talking loudly, sometimes in English and sometimes in French, and declaring, over and over again, that this was the most magnificent scrape he had ever got into.

"Well, I can't help it," grumbled Pierre. "You know that I didn't want to have anything to do with it in the first place. I told you just how it would end, and now there is no use in wasting words over it. Let's be moving, for as long as we stay here we're in danger."

Pierre bustled out of the room, and presently returned with an axe, a side of meat, a small bag of corn-meal, and a couple of old blankets, which he deposited in the hall. He then approached the prisoner and remarked, as he began untying his arms—

"As those things are intended for you, you can take them down to the boat yourself. Have you a flint and steel?"

"I have," replied Chase. "Is that all you are going to give me for an outfit?"

"Of course, and you may be glad to get it, too. What more do you want? There's grub enough to last you a week, blankets to keep you warm of

nights, and an axe to build your camp and cut fire-wood."

"Why, I want a gun and some ammunition. How am I going to get anything to eat after that bread and meat are gone?"

"Trap it, that's the way. Your own gun is on board the schooner; we've got none here to give you, and besides, you don't need one, and shan't have it. Shoulder those things and come along; and mind you, now, no tricks."

Chase picked up his outfit and followed his captors, who, after loading themselves with various articles, which they thought they might need during the voyage, led the way across the clearing at a rapid walk, keeping a bright lookout on all sides to make sure that there was no one observing their movements.

About ten minutes after they left the house, an incident happened there that would have greatly astonished Pierre and his father, could they have witnessed it. At one side of the room in which happened the events that we have just attempted to describe, was an immense fire-place. The lower part of it was built of logs and lined with mud, which had been baked until it was as hard as a

rock. The upper part—that is, the chimney--was built of sticks, and was also plastered with mud, both inside and out. As the chimney had been standing nearly ten years it was in a very dilapidated state, and leaned away from the house as though it meant to fall over every moment. Near the top were several holes which had been made by the sticks burning out and falling into the fireplace; and had Coulte and his son thought to look up at the chimney when they left the house, they would have found that some of these holes were filled with objects they had never seen there before. One of them looked very much like the toe of a heavy boot; and at another opening, about five feet nearer the top, was something that might have been taken for a black hat with three holes cut in it. But it was not a black hat; it was something else.

Shortly after Chase and his captors had disappeared in the woods, this dilapidated structure began to rock and groan in the most alarming manner. Huge cakes of mud fell down into the fire, and had there been any one in the room at the time he would have said that there was some heavy body working its way down the chimney. Presently

a pair of boots appeared below the mouth of the fire-place, then a portion of a pair of trowsers, next the skirts of an overcoat, and at last a human figure dropped down among the smouldering coals, and with one jump reached the middle of the floor, where it stood stamping its feet to shake off the sparks of fire that clung to them, pounding its clothes, scattering a cloud of soot about the room, and gasping for breath. It was Leonard Wilson, but he did not look much like the neatly-dressed young fellow who had entered that room but a short half-hour before.

When Wilson found that Pierre had returned, the first place he thought of was the chimney, which he believed offered the best chances for concealment. He did not like to enter it, for there was considerable wood on the hearth; it was all in a blaze, and he was afraid to trust himself among the flames; but when he heard the door groaning under the furious blows of the axe, he knew that he had no alternative—he must brave the flames or submit to capture. He saw Chase dive under the bed, and after waiting a moment to screw up his courage, he bounded lightly across the floor and sprang into the fire-place. He did not linger there

an instant—if he had, he must have been burned or suffocated, for the flames leaped around his high top-boots, and the smoke ascended so thick and fast that it was impossible to obtain even the smallest breath of air—but mounted at once into the chimney, and placing his back against one side and his knees against the other, quickly worked his way as near the top as his broad shoulders would allow him to go. As it happened there were two holes about half way up the chimney, which were just large enough to admit the toes of his boots; and by forcing a foot into each, and placing his face to another opening nearer the top, he was able to hold his position without the outlay of a great deal of strength, and to obtain all the fresh air he needed. The flimsy old chimney swayed like a tree in a gale of wind as he was ascending it, and threatened to topple over with him every instant; but it maintained its upright position in spite of his additional weight, and afforded him as perfect a concealment as he could have asked for. But, for all that, he was glad when he saw Coulte and his son disappear in the woods, and felt still more at his ease when he found himself safe out of his

smoky hiding-place, and standing in the middle of the room.

"Another close shave," panted Wilson, pulling out his handkerchief and clearing his eyes of the dust and soot. "I put myself in danger for nothing, for Chase is still a prisoner. I know what I shall do now: I'll go straight to Walter Gaylord and tell him everything that has happened. Perhaps he won't be very glad to see me after all the mean things I have been guilty of, but I can't help it."

Wilson pulled off his overcoat and thumped it energetically, beat his slouch hat on the table, wiped his face with his handkerchief, and having thus made a little improvement in his personal appearance, he hurried out into the hall to look for his gun, which he had laid at the foot of the ladder before entering the room. He did not expect to recover it, and consequently was not much disappointed when he found that it was gone. Knowing that Coulte or Pierre had taken charge of the weapon, he did not waste time in looking for it. He stopped long enough to shake his fist at the woods where the two men had disappeared, and to utter the fervent hope that the thief would be knocked heels overhead by the gun the first time

he fired it; and then jumping down the steps drew a bee-line across the clearing toward the canebrake where he had left his horse. He carried his coats on his arm, ready to drop them and put himself in light running order in case he saw Pierre or Bayard Bell and his cousins approaching; and not until he reached the cover of the woods did he regard his escape as accomplished. He found the horses near the place where he had camped the night before, and when he had saddled and bridled both of them, he mounted his own steed and rode off at a gallop, followed by Chase's nag, which kept close behind. Taking the shortest course to Mr. Gaylord's house, which lay through the thickest part of the woods, he went at a break-neck pace, leaping his horse over logs and fences, dashing through thickets of briers and cane that seemed almost impassable, and came at last to the bayou on the banks of which he had halted with his companions the day before to eat his lunch. As he turned down the stream toward the ford, his attention was attracted by a commotion in the bushes on the opposite shore, and in a few seconds Walter Gaylord and Phil Perkins dashed into view. They pulled up their horses when they discovered Wilson, and after gazing at

WILSON'S UNEXPECTED APPEARANCE.

his black face and hands for a moment, Perk called out:

"Now just listen to me and I'll ask you a question; have you turned chimney-sweep?"

"No," replied Wilson. "I've been in a chimney; but I didn't stop to sweep it out. I'd like to talk to you fellows a few minutes." He had been impatient to find Walter and his friends, but now that he was in their presence he wished that the interview might have been postponed a little longer. He did not feel at all uneasy concerning the reception he was likely to meet at their hands, for he knew that they were young gentlemen, and above taking a cowardly revenge on any one; but he was ashamed of the manner in which he had conducted himself toward them, and did not want to be obliged to look them in the face.

"Well, here we are," replied Walter. "What have you got to tell us? Have you seen anything of Featherweight?"

"No—that is—yes; I have heard of him. I have a long story to tell you, and there are some things in it that will astonish you. I hope you don't bear me any ill will for what happened yes

terday, and for the other mean tricks I have done you?"

"No, we don't," replied Walter readily.

"Now I'll just tell you what's a fact," chimed in Perk; "we've got nothing against you or any of your crowd; and if you will only be friendly with us, we'll meet your advances half way."

The boys turned their horses' heads down the stream, and when they reached the ford Walter and Perk crossed over to Wilson's side, and, to show that they meant all they had said, shook hands with him as heartily as though they had always been on the most friendly terms. Their manner put Wilson at his ease at once; and without any preliminary words he began and told the story of the adventures that had befallen him during the last twenty-four hours. To repeat what he said would be to write a good portion of "THE SPORTSMAN'S CLUB IN THE SADDLE" over again. He did not know where Featherweight was, for he had not seen him; and neither could he tell what had happened to Chase, for during the short time that they were besieged in Coulte's house, he had not been allowed an opportunity to talk to him; but he remembered the hint his companion had given him of

Featherweight's condition, and repeated his words to Walter and Perk.

"I have not the least idea where you ought to go to find Fred," said Wilson, in conclusion; "but this much I do know—that he is in a terrible scrape, and that he is on board some vessel. Chase knows all about him, for he has seen him and talked with him. Now, my advice, if you will allow me to offer it, is this: assist me in rescuing Chase, and he will tell you where to find Fred Craven; and, more than that, he and I will stand by you through thick and thin, and do all we can to help you. What do you say?"

Walter and Perk did not say anything immediately, for they were so astonished at the story they had heard that it was a long time before they could speak. They could hardly believe it possible that all the events that Wilson had described had taken place in their immediate neighborhood, and that, too, without their knowledge; and they would have been still more amazed if they had known that only a part of the story had been told them. What would they have thought if they had known that Mr. Bell was the leader of the smugglers of whom Walter had read in the paper the day before;

that his vessel was hidden in a little cove not more than two miles from the place where they were then standing; that Featherweight was stowed away in the hold, waiting to be carried to Cuba; and that when he arrived there he was to be shipped as a foremast hand on board a strange vessel and sent off to Mexico?

"Isn't it the strangest thing in the world that Chase should have been mistaken for me?" cried Walter, as soon as he could speak. "Of course we'll stand by him. How shall we go to work? Suggest something, one of you."

"Now, just listen to me a minute and I'll tell you what I would do," exclaimed Perk. "Wilson, you said that Coulte is going to take Chase down the bayou in the pirogue, didn't you? Well, let's go home and get the Banner, and be ready to catch him when he comes out."

"Perhaps he wouldn't stop when we told him to," said Wilson.

"We'd make him. We'd run over the pirogue and sink her. He'd stop then, wouldn't he?"

"But we'd waste too much time in following that course," said Walter. "We're six miles from home, and it would take two hours to go there and

get the Banner under way. By that time it would be pitch dark. It is forty miles to the village, and ten more along the coast to the bayou, so that we would have to run fifty miles while the pirogue was running about one fifth as far. Another thing," added Walter, looking up at the clouds, "it's going to be a bad night, and I don't care to trust my yacht outside in a gale."

Walter was in earnest when he said this, and it would have been hard work for any one to have made him believe that he was destined to spend, not only the greater portion of that night, but the whole of the succeeding week on the Gulf, while the wind was blowing, the sleet flying, and the waves running as high as his mast-head. But he did it.

"I think the best plan would be," he continued, "to ride at once for the bayou and cut a tree across it—you know that the stream is very narrow for a long distance above its mouth—so that Coulte can't sail out with the pirogue. If we can keep him in the swamp until morning, we can get help and capture him. What do you think of that, Wilson?"

"I like your plan the best," was the reply.

"We need not go a step out of our way for an axe, for we can get one at Coulte's house."

While the boys were discussing the matter, the clear, ringing blast of a hunting-horn echoed through the woods. Perk sounded his own horn in reply, and presently Eugene and Bab galloped up. Their appearance was most opportune, and saved Walter the trouble of riding in search of them. They were surprised to see Wilson—they were obliged to take two looks at him before they recognised him—and Eugene at first scowled at him, and acted very much as though he would like to settle up some of the little accounts he held against him; but when Walter, after telling him that he had brought news of Featherweight, repeated the story of his adventures, and described the plan they had just decided upon, Eugene changed his mind, and extended a most cordial greeting to Wilson, in which he was joined by Bab.

Of course there were a thousand and one questions to be asked and answered, and during the ride to the bayou the Club kept Wilson talking continually. They compelled him to tell his story over and over again, and each time expressed their astonishment and indignation in no measured terms.

They all gave it as their opinion that Featherweight had somehow managed to fall into the hands of the smugglers, and that he was detained by them: but, of course, they could not determine upon any plans for his release until they knew where he was confined, and that could not be ascertained until they had rescued Chase.

In half an hour the boys reached Coulte's plantation, and after reconnoitering the premises to make sure that none of the family had returned, they dismounted in front of the porch and went into the house to secure the axe, and to look at the room in which Chase and Wilson had been besieged. Everything in and about the apartment—the shattered door, the hole in the floor of the loft, the broken furniture, the empty shelves in the cupboard, and the huge cakes of mud in the fire-place, which Wilson had knocked off while he was coming out of the chimney, bore testimony to the truthfulness of his story. The members of the Club were interested in everything they saw, and would have overwhelmed Wilson with questions, had not Walter reminded them that the longer they lingered, the longer they would be separated from Featherweight. The mention of the secretary's name brought

them to their saddles again; and in a few minutes more they had left the old Frenchman's house behind them, and were galloping through the woods toward the bayou.

CHAPTER XIII.

PERK TAKES A BATH.

AS soon as they had left the clearing, Walter, who led the way and acted as commander of the expedition, changed his course, and instead of going directly toward the bayou, held his way through the woods parallel with the stream, and about a mile distant from it. He was afraid that if he and his companions followed the bank of the bayou they might stumble upon Coulte before they knew it, and he hoped by this course to avoid meeting him altogether. Their object was to get ahead of him, and reach the mouth of the bayou first, and that, too, without giving the old Frenchman any reason to believe that he was pursued. If the latter knew that there was some one on his trail, he might remain in the swamp, or try to reach the Gulf by some other route; in which case they would lose the opportunity of rescuing Chase.

For the next ten miles the boys rode at a full

gallop, and never once drew rein until they arrived on the bank of the bayou about a mile above its mouth. This was the narrowest part of the stream, and they had selected it as the best point at which to intercept the pirogue; but, to their great delight, they found that the wind had anticipated their designs, and that it would not be necessary to use their axe at all. A large poplar, which leaned over the bayou, having been uprooted, had fallen into the water, the top resting near one shore and the butt on the other. If they had felled the tree themselves they could not have placed it in a better position for blockading the bayou. It lay so close to the surface of the water that the smallest canoe could not go under it, and was so high that a vessel of the size of the pirogue could not be easily dragged over it. The only way that Coulte could pass would be to take the pirogue ashore and carry it around the obstruction; but that was a thing that Walter and his friends did not intend to allow him to do. He *did* do it, however, and not one of the Club made the least effort to prevent him.

The boys dismounted near the tree, and Perk, after hitching his horse, sprang upon it and walked out over the water to see if he could discover any

signs of the pirogue. It was already dark—so dark that he was obliged to exercise considerable caution in moving along the log. The trees threw a deep shade into the water on each side of the bayou; but there was a bright streak in the middle, extending up and down the stream as far as his eyes could reach, and Perk was certain that he saw something in it. He listened, and distinctly heard a rushing sound such as a boat makes when passing rapidly through the water. He was all excitement in a moment.

"Keep close there, fellows," he whispered, addressing himself to his companions on the bank. "We're just in time. They're coming as sure as the world. And like a steamboat, too," he added, mentally. "I hope they will strike the tree and smash their old pirogue into kindling-wood."

Perk being afraid to return to the bank lest he should be discovered by the men in the pirogue, stretched himself out at full length on the log and kept his eyes fastened on the approaching vessel. In a few seconds she began to loom up more distinctly through the darkness, and Perk was astonished at the amount of canvas she carried and the manner in which she was handled. Her huge sail

extended up into the air until it seemed to reach above the tops of the trees, and, although Pierre and Coulte had seated themselves as far back in the stern-sheets as they could get, her bow, instead of riding gracefully over the waves, was forced down into them by every gust of wind that filled the canvas. It was plain that Coulte and his son were in a great hurry, and that they thought more of speed than they did of their own comfort or the safety of the vessel.

"They've more faith in that old tub than I would have if I was in her," soliloquized Perk. "If she labors so badly here in the bayou, where the water is comparatively smooth, and the wind hasn't half a chance at her, what would she do if she was out in the Gulf? But she'll never get out there. She's going to smash herself into a million pieces."

The boys on the bank, who had by this time discovered the pirogue, thought so, too. She continued to approach the log at almost railroad speed, and Perk held his breath in suspense, and even clasped his arms around the tree as if he feared that the concussion might knock him off into the water; but Pierre, who handled the helm, was on the watch, and when the pirogue had arrived within

ten feet of the obstruction, he discovered the danger and with one sweep of his arm escaped it.

"Whew!" whistled Coulte, clenching his teeth tightly on the stem of his never-failing pipe, and holding fast to the stern-sheets with both hands; "somedings wrong again!"

"Yes, of course there is," replied Pierre. "Haven't things been going wrong with us ever since we began to meddle with this business? Here's a log extending clear across the bayou, and I came within an inch of running into it. We'll have to go ashore and pull the boat around it."

While this conversation was going on the pirogue, which had been thrown up into the wind, was drifting down the stream broadside on, and now brought up against the log directly in front of the place where Perk lay. Coulte and his son both saw him there, but did not take a second look at him, supposing him to be a huge knot on the body of the tree. While Perk was waiting to be discovered, and expecting it every moment, a brilliant idea occurred to him. He looked over into the pirogue, which was bobbing up and down with the waves scarcely two feet from him, and just then a figure, which was stretched out in the stern of the

boat, raised itself to a sitting posture and said, in a frightened voice:

"I hope there is no danger. Remember that I am tied hand and foot, and that if we are capsized I can't swim a stroke."

"Lie down, and hold your tongue," replied Pierre, savagely. "Small loss it will be to us or anybody else, if you do go to the bottom!"

In obedience to Pierre's order Chase—for it was he who spoke—tried to lie down again, and was a good deal astonished to find that he could not do it. A pair of arms were suddenly thrust out of the darkness, strong fingers fastened into his collar, and in a twinkling Chase found himself lifted bodily out of the pirogue and thrown across the log. He looked up and saw a dark form kneeling beside him, which quickly jumped to its feet and catching him up in its arms, started with him toward the bank. It was Perk, who highly elated with the exploit he had performed, called out to his companions on shore:

"Now just listen to me a moment, and I'll tell you what's a fact: I've got him."

It was so dark that Walter and his friends could not see what was going on at the middle of the

bayou. They were at a loss to determine whether Perk had got hold of Chase, or Coulte, or Pierre; but knowing by the tones of his voice that he was highly excited over something, they sprang upon the log and ran toward him. "Hold fast to him, whoever he is," cried Walter. We're coming."

"I'll do it," replied Perk. "I've got him, as sure as I am an inch high."

"Have you?" exclaimed a gruff voice. "Then bring him back here and give him to me."

There was a shuffling of feet and other indications of a brief struggle on the log, and angry exclamations from Perk, two or three savage blows that were plainly heard by the boys on the bank, and then a loud splashing in the water, followed by a hoarse, gurgling sound, as if some one was gasping for breath. The boys stood transfixed with horror, fully aware that a desperate fight was going on before them in the darkness, but not knowing which way to turn or what to do to assist their friend. The rapidity with which this state of affairs had been brought about utterly bewildered them, and for a moment they stood speechless and motionless.

"Don't desert me, Perk," cried Chase, his voice coming from the water. "I am helpless."

"Never fear," was Perk's encouraging reply. "It isn't my style to desert a fellow when he's in trouble. Let go his collar, Coulte, or I'll pull you overboard."

"Whew! Whew! Everydings is going wrong again," exclaimed the old Frenchman; and the boys knew from the tones of his voice and the manner in which he spoke that he was struggling desperately with some one. "Ah! oui! everydings. Leave go, Meester Perkins."

"Now just listen to me a moment and I'll tell you what is a fact: let go yourself, or come out of that boat."

"Take that! and that!" shouted Pierre; and then came the sound of heavy blows on the water and a cry of distress from Perk.

All these things happened in much less time than we have taken to describe them. It was probably not more than half a minute from the time that Perk lifted Chase out of the boat until the fight was over, but during that time his triumph had been turned into utter defeat. When Walter and his friends reached the middle of the log the pirogue had disappeared, and there was no one in sight.

Perk had begun to exult over his victory a little

too soon. His plan for releasing Chase was a bold one, and the suddenness with which it was carried into execution struck both Pierre and his father dumb with astonishment. They saw the object, which they imagined to be a knot on the tree, spring into life and action, seize their prisoner by his collar and pull him out of the boat, and they never made a move to prevent it. It was not until they heard the sound of Perk's voice and saw him jump to his feet and run along the log toward the bank, that they seemed to realize what was going on. Then Pierre aroused himself, and after a short fight, during which he received one or two blows from the boy's hard fist that made him see stars, succeeded in catching him by the ankle and pulling him off the log.

Perk's sudden immersion in the cold water almost took his breath away, and made him feel for a moment as if every drop of blood in his body had been turned into ice; still he retained his presence of mind and all his courage, and as soon as he arose to the surface, he caught the helpless Chase by the collar, and lifting his head above the water struck out for shore. But Coulte had by this time recovered himself, and he, too, seized Chase and

held fast to him. Both boys struggled hard to break his hold, but finding that the old Frenchman hung on like grim death, Perk laid hold of his hair and exerted all his strength to drag him overboard —an undertaking that he would have quickly accomplished had not Pierre snatched up an oar and struck him a severe blow with it. That did the business for Perk. With a cry of pain he released his hold of Chase's collar, and, as he sank slowly out of sight in the water, Coulte pulled his prisoner into the boat, while Pierre seized the helm and pulled away for the opposite side of the bayou.

"Where are you, Perk?" shouted Walter, running up and down the log, and looking in vain for his friend. "Sing out."

"What's that?" exclaimed Wilson, pointing to a dark object which just at that moment arose from under the log, and floated slowly down the stream.

"It's a head!" cried Bab, with blanched cheeks.

"And Perk's head, too!" gasped Eugene. "I would know that long black hair of his anywhere."

Fortunately, Walter was not in the least excited or dismayed; if he had been, Perk might have drifted on down the stream, and sunk for good before any effort was made to assist him While the

others stood with their necks outstretched, their mouths wide open, and their eyes almost starting from their sockets, staring hard at the object in the water, and wondering if it was really a human head, or only a piece of driftwood, Walter had hurriedly divested himself of both his coats, kicked off his boots, and taken a header from the log. The object was still bobbing about in the waves, and floating slowly down the stream, and a few swift strokes brought Walter close up to it. It was Perk's head, sure enough. The brave young fellow was struggling feebly, but with a very poor prospect of extricating himself from his dangerous situation, for the blow that Pierre dealt him had taken away all his strength, and his heavy clothing, which hung upon him like so many pounds of iron, weighed him down in the water until nothing but the top of his head could be seen above the surface.

Walter was quick in his movements, knowing that there was not an instant to be lost, but cautious also. Having learned by experience that it is a dangerous piece of business to trust one's self within reach of a drowning person, he swam up behind his friend, and, watching his opportunity, seized him by the back of the neck, lifted his head

above the water, and held him off at arm's length Perk kicked and thrashed about wonderfully, beating the water into foam, making blind clutches at the empty air, and trying hard to turn about, so that he could take hold of Walter; but the latter held his arm as stiff as an iron bar, and having secured a firm hold of Perk's long hair, he compelled the latter to keep his back toward him, and held him in that position while he carried him toward the shore.

In the mean time the old Frenchman and his son were not idle. Taking advantage of the confusion that prevailed among the Club, they filled away for the shore, took down the sail, dragged the boat around the obstruction, launched it again on the other side, and resumed their voyage toward the Gulf—Pierre expressing great astonishment at the whole transaction, and swearing lustily at the delay that had been occasioned, and at the wind which continued to increase in fury as night came on; Coulte wondering at the recklessness Perk had displayed in attacking them single-handed, and feeling his head, which still ached from the effects of the strong pulls the boy had given at his hair; and Chase, encouraging himself one moment with the hope of

a speedy rescue, and the next holding his breath in dismay, when he thought of the dangers yet to be encountered.

Poor Chase was in a miserable condition. His hands and feet were still bound, his clothes were dripping with water that was almost cold enough to freeze, and he was exposed to the full force of the wind, every gust of which seemed to cut him to the bone. But, after all, he did not mind this so much as he did the voyage into the Gulf, which, unless something happened to prevent it, would be commenced in less than ten minutes. Suppose the boat should go down, what chance had he for his life? He tried to induce his captors to release him, assuring them that there was no possible chance for him to escape now that they were so far from the shore; but not only did they refuse to grant his request, but they would not even permit him to see what was going on around him. As soon as the pirogue was once more fairly under way, Coulte forced him to lie down on the bottom of the boat, and threw a blanket over his head. This, in some measure, protected him from the wind and the spray, but he would much rather have been exposed to the full fury of the gale, if he had only

been allowed the free use of his eyes. To be blindfolded, so that he could not see when danger approached, was positive torture to him.

The journey to the island was by this time fairly begun, and it continued four long hours. The wind blew even harder on the Gulf than Chase had imagined, the waves rolled higher, and the voyage was quite as perilous as he had expected it would be. Nothing but the greatest skill and the most watchful care on Pierre's part, kept the pirogue right-side up. He had his hands full in minding the helm, and Coulte had as much as he could do to bail out the water as fast as it came in. It began to gain at last, and Chase was glad of it, for it was the means of securing his release.

"Whew! I don't can shtand dis no longer," panted the old Frenchman, after he had used his bucket until every bone in his old body ached with fatigue. "Meester Shase must help, or we goes to ze bottom."

"Untie him then," growled his son. "I guess there's no danger now that he will jump overboard and swim ashore."

The pirogue was rolling and pitching in the most alarming manner, and Coulte, not having his sea

legs on, found it a matter of some difficulty to work his way back to the stern where Chase was lying. During the time that he was employed in freeing the prisoner's hands and feet, short as it was, the water gained rapidly; and when Chase sprang up and seized the bucket, it was almost knee deep in the bottom of the pirogue.

As soon as Chase found himself at liberty his courage all returned. Having been brought up on board a yacht, like all the rest of the Bellville boys, he was not very much afraid of a gale, although he could not help being appalled at the scene that was now presented to his gaze. The sky was clearing up a little to windward, and there was light enough for him to see that the water was in a frightful commotion. One moment the pirogue would be riding on the top of a wave, which to a landsman would have looked as high as a mountain; the next she would sink down into an abyss that appeared to be almost bottomless, and the huge billows would come rolling after her, seemingly on the point of engulfing her every instant. Chase looked at the waves and then at his captors to see what they thought about it, and he was satisfied that if they could have put the boat about without

danger of swamping her, and gone back to the shore, they would have done it gladly. She was now running before the wind, and consequently was comparatively safe; but an attempt on the part of her crew to bring her about and to beat back to the main land, would have resulted in her destruction. She must go on, for she could not turn back. Pierre and Coulte both knew that as well as Chase did. The old Frenchman was literally shaking with terror, while Pierre was as white as a sheet.

When Chase had noted these things, he went to work with his bucket, and for two hours scarcely paused to take breath. At the end of that time Pierre began to keep a sharp lookout in front of him, knowing that if he had not missed his course he ought to be somewhere near the island. Presently Chase discovered it looming up through the darkness, looking a thousand-fold more gloomy and uninviting than it had ever before appeared in his eyes, and then he too began to be uneasy, lest the pirogue should be dashed upon the beach and broken in pieces by the surf. But the good fortune that had attended them during the voyage had not yet deserted them, and in spite of the wind and the

waves Pierre succeeded in piloting the boat between two high points, and running her ashore in a little cove where she was effectually protected from the fury of the gale

CHAPTER XIV.

CHASE TURNS THE TABLES.

WHEN Chase, who was the first to spring ashore, had drawn the bow of the pirogue out of the water, he took a turn up and down the beach and looked about him. This was not the first time he had visited the island. He had often been there in company with Wilson and Bayard Bell and his cousins, and he knew every tree and stump on it. It was a favorite shooting and fishing ground of his, and he thought it a fine place to camp out for a night or two; but he had never wanted to live there. He was thinking busily while he was walking up and down the beach, and revolving something in his mind that made his heart beat a trifle faster than usual. He did not want to remain there alone, and he was determined that he would not. He would return to the village if he could that very night; but if he was obliged to stay, Coulte and Pierre should stay with him.

The cove in which the pirogue landed, and which was large enough to receive and shelter a vessel of a hundred tons burden, was surrounded on three sides by a high bluff thickly covered with bushes from base to summit. In these bluffs were two or three caves in which cooking-utensils, old-fashioned weapons, and rusty pieces of money had been found, giving rise to the supposition that the island had at one time been the harboring-place of the noted Lafitte. The story-tellers of the village declared that some thrilling scenes had been enacted there. Whether or not this was true we cannot tell; but this we do know: that before Chase set his foot on the mainland again, he saw as much excitement and adventure there as he wanted, and even more than enough to satisfy him.

"Well," exclaimed Pierre, who seemed to be greatly relieved to find himself on solid ground once more, "we did it, didn't we? We're here at last."

"I'd rather be somewhere else," replied Chase. "Do you know, Pierre, that I shall be hard up for bread while I stay here? The corn-meal in that bag is thoroughly soaked with salt water."

"The bacon is all right," returned Pierre.

"When you got tired of living on that you can catch a wild duck."

"By putting salt on its tail, I suppose," interrupted Chase. "I don't see how else I am to catch it."

"Take this lantern and axe and look around and find something to start a fire with," continued Pierre. "We'll have to stay here with you until the wind goes down, because we can't beat up against it in the pirogue. Even if we could, I wouldn't try it. I've seen enough of the Gulf for one night."

"I believe you," said Chase to himself. "If I can make things work to my satisfaction you'll never sail that pirogue back to the village. As soon as you are asleep I'll run her around under the lee of the island, and stay there until the wind goes down and the sea falls, and then I'll fill away for home. If I can't do that, I'll take possession of the eatables, knock a hole in the pirogue, and get out of your way by intrenching myself in the 'Kitchen.' By doing that I can make prisoners of you and your father as effectually as though you were bound hand and foot."

Chase was so highly elated over his plans for

turning the tables upon his captors, and so sure that one or the other of them would operate successfully, that he allowed a smile to break over his face. Pierre saw it, and interpreted it rightly. It put an idea into his head, and he determined to watch Chase as closely now as he had done before.

"I want to ask you a question," said Pierre, while Chase was trying to light the lantern with some damp matches Coulte had given him. "Did those fellows we had the fight with at the log know that we were going to take you to this island?"

"Of course they did; Wilson told them. He was there with them, because I heard his voice. They'll come over here with an officer or two as soon as the wind dies away a little, and they will be looking for you as well as for me. What good will it do you now that you have brought me here? It seems to me that by doing it you have made your situation worse instead of better. You are prisoners here the same as I am."

Chase knew by the expression which settled on his face that he had started a train of serious reflections in Pierre's mind. Leaving him to follow them out at his leisure he picked up the lantern, shoul-

dered the axe, and after looking about among the bushes for a few minutes, found a dry log from which he cut an armful of chips with which to start the fire. He worked industriously, and by the time that the old Frenchman and his son had unloaded the pirogue and hauled her out upon the beach, he had a roaring fire going, and a comfortable camp made behind a projecting point of one of the bluffs. He then returned to the canoe to bring up the blankets belonging to the outfit with which Pierre had provided him; and when he had spread them and his coats out in front of the fire to dry, he went to work to cook his supper and prepare his bed. Neither of these duties occupied a great deal of time. All he had in the way of eatables was the bacon, a few slices of which he cut off and laid upon the coals; and for a bed he scraped together a few armfuls of leaves, and deposited them at the roots of a wide-spreading beech which extended its limbs protectingly over the camping-ground. When Pierre and his father came up he was sitting before the fire in his shirt sleeves, turning his bacon with a sharp stick.

"What made you locate the camp so far away

from the boat?" asked the former, looking suspiciously at his prisoner.

"Why, you don't want to watch her all night, do you? I selected this point because it is sheltered from the wind. Don't you think it a good idea? If you want any supper help yourselves; only touch that bacon lightly, for it is all I shall have to eat until I see home again."

"What's got into you all of a sudden?" asked Pierre, who could not understand why his prisoner, who had heretofore been so gloomy and disheartened, should suddenly appear to be much at his ease. "What trick are you up to?"

"I don't know that I am particularly jolly—I feel much better than I did a few hours ago," replied Chase. "I am dry and warm now; and another thing, I know that I shall not be obliged to stay here as long as I at first feared. I'll be taken off before to-morrow night, and then you had better look out for me. I'll show you—"

Chase was going on to say that he would show Pierre and his father, and Bayard Bell and every one else who had had a hand in his capture, that there was a law in the land, and that they could not waylay peaceable young fellows and shut them

up in smuggling vessels and starve them and carry them off to desert islands with impunity; but Pierre glared at him so savagely that he thought it best to hold his peace.

Coulte and his son were not slow to follow the example set them by their captive. If one might judge by the numerous slices of bacon they cut off and laid upon the coals, the fright they had sustained during the voyage to the island had not injured their appetites in the least. They helped themselves most bountifully, and while their supper was cooking pulled off their coats, and spread the blankets and other articles that composed the cargo of the pirogue, in front of the fire to dry.

The meal was not as good as some Chase had eaten on that same island, but it served to satisfy the cravings of his hunger, and when the last piece of bacon had disappeared he spread one of his coats upon his bed of leaves, drew the blanket over him, thrust his feet out toward the fire and closed his eyes—but not to sleep. Tired, and almost exhausted, as he was, that was a thing that did not enter his head. He had better business on hand, and that was to watch Coulte and Pierre. They ate their bacon very deliberately, smoked two or

three pipes of tobacco, and then arose and walked out on the beach. This movement was enough to arouse the suspicions of the prisoner, who, as soon as they were out of sight and hearing, sprang to his feet and looked around the point of the bluff to see what they were going to do.

"There's one of my plans knocked into a cocked hat," said Chase, as he watched the proceedings of the two men; "but I have another in reserve, and I know it will work. I am afraid I have done something to excite their suspicions."

He certainly had. The smile that Pierre had seen on his face had made him alert and watchful, and he and his father thought it best to put it out of Chase's power to leave the island without their knowledge. They went straight to the pirogue, and after turning it bottom upward, moved it close to a tree at the base of the bluff, and made it fast with a chain and padlock. Not satisfied with this, they carried the sail and oars into the bushes and concealed them there; and when they came out they shouldered their guns and returned to the camp. They looked at their prisoner as they walked past him, but he lay with a blanket over his head, apparently fast asleep.

Coulte and Pierre were ready to go to bed now, and the captive was quite willing that they should do so. They began snoring lustily almost as soon as they touched their blankets, but Chase, being cautious and crafty, and unwilling to endanger the success of his scheme by being too hasty, for a long time made no movement. Being convinced at last that they were really asleep, and not trying to deceive him, he threw the blanket off his head and slowly arose to his feet. His first move was to pull on his overcoat and boots; his next to secure possession of the meat and axe; and his third to light the lantern with a brand from the fire. He looked wishfully at the guns which Pierre and his father had taken care to put under their blankets before lying down, but he could not secure them without arousing one or the other of the men. However, it was some consolation to know that the weapons would be of very little use to their owners. They had not more than two or three charges of dry powder between them, for the large flask that Pierre carried had been thoroughly soaked during the voyage to the island.

Having lighted his lantern Chase rolled up his blankets and put them under his arm, picked up

the meat, shouldered the axe, and, thus equipped, walked rapidly around the bluff toward the place where the pirogue lay. He spent some time in searching among the bushes for the sail, and having found it at last he pulled it out of its hiding-place, and bent his steps toward the interior of the island. After walking about a hundred yards he entered a little gulley, which seemed to run up the side of the bluff, and a short distance further on his progress was stopped by a perpendicular cliff, which arose to the height of forty or fifty feet. By the aid of his lantern he closely surveyed the face of this cliff, and having at last discovered some object of which he appeared to be in search, he rested the mast, which was rolled up in the canvas, against a projecting point of the cliff; and after making sure that the lower end was placed firmly on the ground so that it would not slip, he ran his arm through the ring in the lantern and began to climb up the sail. When he arrived at the top he pushed aside the bushes, disclosing to view a dark opening, which appeared to run back into the cliff. Thrusting his lantern into it he surveyed it suspiciously for a moment, as if half afraid to enter, and then clambered up and crept into the opening on his hands and

knees. After working his way along a dark and narrow passage he found himself in a cave about twenty feet long and half as wide, which was known among the village boys as "The Kitchen"—so called from the fact that it was here that the cooking utensils had been found—and this Chase intended should be his hiding-place and his fortress as long as he remained on the island. It promised to answer his purpose admirably. It was so effectually concealed that a dozen men might have searched the island for a month without discovering it, and it could be easily defended in case of an attack. The bluff in which it was located was perpendicular on all sides, and the only way one could get into it was by making use of a ladder or pole, as Chase had done.

Chase raised his lantern above his head, and surveyed the cave with a smile of satisfaction. In one corner were the remains of a fire which he and his companions had built the last time they camped there, and over it was a narrow crevice extending to the tops of the bluff, and answering all the purposes of a window and chimney. In the opposite corner was a supply of wood sufficient to cook his meals for three or four days, and in another was a

pile of leaves that had more than once served him for a bed. His camp was all ready for occupation, and he had nothing to do but to bring up the outfit he had left at the foot of the bluff. This required two journeys up and down the sail. He brought the meat first, the blankets next, and after stowing them away in the cave was ready to carry out the second and most dangerous part of his programme. He tied the lantern to the bushes at the mouth of the cave so that its rays would shine down into the gulley below, divested himself of his coat, and sliding down the sail to the ground, shouldered his axe and started back for the beach. He left the axe by the pirogue, and approached the camp on tip-toe to look at Coulte and his son. They were still sleeping soundly, and Chase, lingering long enough to shake his clenched hand at each of them, and to mutter something about their being astonished when they awoke in the morning, hurried back to the pirogue and caught up his axe. "Turn about is fair play, Pierre," said he, as he swung the implement aloft. "You have had things all your own way this far, and now I'll manage affairs for awhile. I'll teach you to think twice before you

tie a boy hand and foot again and take him to sea in a dugout."

Whack! came the axe upon the pirogue, the force with which it was driven sinking it almost to the handle in the soft wood, and opening a wide seam along the whole length of the little vessel. Another blow and another followed; but just as he raised his axe for the fourth time he heard an exclamation of wonder, and looked up to see Pierre and Coulte standing at the foot of the bluff.

"Ah! whew!" exclaimed the latter, comprehending the state of affairs at once.

"Ah! oui!" replied Chase, exactly imitating the old Frenchman's way of talking; "somedings is wrong again, and dis times it is somedings pooty bad. Whew!"

"What are you about there?" demanded Pierre.

"O, nothing," answered Chase, bringing his axe down with greater force than before; "only I am tired of seeing this old boat lying around. You don't want to use her any more, do you? You'll go back to the village in style, you know. The people there think so much of you that they'll send a yacht after you."

Pierre uttered something that sounded very much

like an oath, and came down the beach with all the speed he could command; but Chase, as active as a cat, darted into the woods and was half way up the gulley before the clumsy smuggler had taken a dozen steps. It was dark in the bushes, and the noise he made in running through them guided his enemies in the pursuit; but he succeeded in climbing up the sail, encumbered as he was with the axe, and pulled it up after him. He did not have time to remove the lantern before Coulte and Pierre came up. The former, as usual, expressed his astonishment and rage by loud whistles, while Pierre looked about for some means of ascending the bluff. Knowing himself to be in a safe position, Chase was disposed to be facetious.

"I say, Pierre," he exclaimed; "what will you give me if I will pass the sail down to you? That's the only way you can come up here, seeing that you have no axe to cut a pole with."

"I'll give you something you won't like when I get my hands on you," hissed Pierre, between his clenched teeth. "Come down from there."

"Do you want me to come now, or will you wait till I do come? You won't go back to the village to-morrow and leave me here all alone, will you?

You'll stay, like a good fellow, till the yacht comes, won't you? If you want anything to eat in the mean time, you can catch a wild duck, you know."

Pierre and his father were too angry to reply. They conversed a while in low tones, and then started down the gulley toward the beach. When they had disappeared, Chase blew out his lantern, and sitting down in the mouth of the cave with his axe in his hand, waited to see what they were going to do.

While these events were transpiring on the island, others, in which Chase would have been deeply interested could he have been made acquainted with them, were taking place on the main shore.

We left the Sportsman's Club in great confusion. They saw the pirogue when she filled away for the mouth of the bayou, but they were too deeply interested in Perk's welfare to pay any attention to her. The latter was in good hands, and before the pirogue was fairly out of sight he was safely landed on the bank, where he lay gasping for breath and almost benumbed with the cold.

"Start a fire, somebody," exclaimed Walter, as soon as he had dragged his friend out of the water;

"and the rest of you come here and help me rub some life into this fellow. Pierre shall suffer for this."

When Walter uttered these words he uttered the sentiments of the entire party. Perk was a favorite with them all—even Wilson liked him now, after his daring attempt to rescue Chase—and they did not intend to see him abused. They worked for him like troopers—Wilson and Eugene kindling a fire, and the others stripping off his clothes and rubbing him with all their might. Fortunately there was not much the matter with him. The blow he had received was not serious, and after he had been relieved of his wet clothing and stretched out on a pile of overcoats before a roaring fire, he began to recover himself. The boys considered it a good sign when he cried out that he was all right, but kept on chafing him most unmercifully until they had got him on his feet.

The next thing was to dress him warmly to prevent him from taking cold, and that was quickly done; each boy, with the exception of Walter, who was as wet as a drowned rat, readily surrendering up to him some portion of his own dry clothing. In half an hour Perk was himself again; and after

giving his companions a vivid description of his fight with Pierre and Coulte, he inquired what was to be done now? "It isn't too late yet to try the plan I proposed," said he. "Let's go home and get the Banner and Uncle Dick, and pursue them at once. We know that they are going to Lost Island, so of course it will be no trouble to find them."

"I'm in for that," shouted Eugene, who was always delighted with the idea of a cruise, no matter how bad the weather was. "Let's take a vote on it."

"We can stop at the village and tell Mr. Craven that Fred is missing," said Bab.

"And I will have something to say to my father and Mr. Chase," chimed in Wilson. "Of course some of them will accompany us, and, with their assistance, we can capture Coulte and Pierre, if we find them."

"We'll do that anyhow," replied Eugene; "especially if Uncle Dick goes with us. He can manage them both. It's just gay, outside, to-night. The white-caps are running, and we'll have a chance to see how the Banner will behave in a gale. I wish

Featherweight was here. He does so enjoy a sail when the water is rough."

It was wonderful how the members of the Club missed the Secretary at every turn. They were very lonesome without him, and now that there was a prospect of their going on a cruise, they wanted him more than ever. He was the life of the Club at all times, and more particularly while they were on shipboard. He was fond of the water, and took to a boat as naturally as though he had been born on board of one. With the exception of Walter, who had no superior among boys of his age anywhere, he was the best sailor at the Academy, and so skilful was he that his friends used to say that he could make his yacht walk squarely into the wind's eye. He was a wonderful fellow to carry sail, and would keep every inch of his canvas spread long after vessels larger than his own had begun to haul it down. This made the students afraid of him; and when the yacht-club was getting ready to go on its annual cruise, Featherweight sometimes found it hard work to raise a crew for his vessel. But, after all, he was fortunate, and always brought his yacht back to the village in just as good trim as she was when she went out. The

Club, while regretting his absence, and telling one another that he was losing a great deal in not being there to accompany them on their cruise, little imagined that he was destined to feel as much of the Gulf-breeze that night as any of them.

"I can see that you are all in favor of Perk's plan," said Walter; "so there's no need of taking a vote on it. Let's put out the fire and be off. No lagging behind, now."

The Club were fifteen miles from Mr. Gaylord's house. For half the distance their course lay along a bridle-path which ran through the thickest part of the woods, and the deep shade cast by the trees made it so dark that they could not see their hands before them. The way was obstructed by logs and thickets of briers and canes, and the branches of the trees hung over the path, and struck them violently in the face as they passed. It was not a pleasant road to travel in the day-time, and still less so on a night like this, and with such a leader as Walter Gaylord, who was quite as dashing and reckless a rider as Featherweight was a sailor. He kept Tom in a full gallop, which he never once slackened until he bent from his saddle to open the gate that led into the carriage-way.

CHAPTER XV.

THE REVENUE CUTTER.

"NOW fellows," said Walter, as they rode along the carriage-way, "let's divide the work, so that there may be no delay. Eugene, put the horses in the stable and feed them. Bab and Wilson, go down and pull the Banner out of the bayou, loosen the sails, and get everything ready for an immediate start. While you are doing that, Perk and I will go in and get on some dry clothing, and tell father and Uncle Dick what has happened. When we come down to the boat we'll bring a couple of baskets of provisions with us."

As soon as the boys reached the house they sprang from their saddles, and hurried off to perform the work assigned them. Ten minutes afterwards, when Walter and Perk, none the worse for their cold bath in the bayou, joined the rest of the Club on board the yacht, they found her all ready for sea. The hatches had been thrown open, the

cabin unlocked, the binnacle lighted, the lamps hoisted at the catheads, the sails were loose and flapping in the wind, and the little vessel was held to the bank by a bow and stern line, both ends of which were made fast on deck so that they could be cast off without going ashore.

"Fellows, I am afraid that you have done all this work for nothing," exclaimed Walter, as he and Perk sprang over the rail and deposited their baskets of provisions on deck. "Uncle Dick has not got back yet, and neither has father."

The expression of disappointment that settled on the faces of the yacht's crew, as well as the exclamations they uttered, showed that this was anything but a pleasant piece of news. Uncle Dick was just the man for the occasion. He would have entered heartily into their scheme—he was interested in everything his young friends did—and he would have carried it out successfully, too.

"They are still out looking for Featherweight," continued Walter, "and haven't been home since morning. I told mother where we are going and what we intend to do, and she says that when they return she will send them after us in the Lookout."

The Lookout was Mr. Gaylord's yacht. When

the season closed she had been left at the village for repairs; and although the work on her was all completed, she had not yet been brought home. The boys would have been glad to make the cruise with her instead of the Banner, for she was a much swifter boat; but it required a crew of ten men to handle her, and that was a larger force than they could raise.

"Shall we wait for Uncle Dick, or go without him?" asked Walter, in conclusion.

"Let's go now," exclaimed Eugene. "There's no knowing what we may lose by an hour's delay. I'd as soon trust myself on the Gulf with you as with Uncle Dick."

The other boys expressed the same unlimited confidence in their young commander, and urged an immediate departure; and Walter, who, like all modest young fellows, had a poor opinion of his abilities, turned to Perk, whom he had selected to act as his assistant, and rather reluctantly ordered him to get the yacht under way.

The members of the Club were in their element now, and if Featherweight had only been with them they would have been as happy as boys could well be. They loved their horses, and were quite

at home in the saddle; but a staunch, swift vessel was what they most delighted in. The Banner suited them exactly. She was small—not more than one-fourth the size of the smuggling vessel—but she had been built under Walter's own supervision, with an eye to comfort and safety rather than speed, and the boys knew that they could trust her anywhere.

In the forward part of the vessel, where the forecastle would have been located if she had had one, was the galley. It was a small apartment, of course, but it was well fitted up, and provided with everything in the shape of pots, pans, and kettles that any cook could possibly find use for. A door in one side of it opened directly into the cabin, which occupied the whole of the after-part of the vessel, no space being taken up with state-rooms. It was carpeted, and furnished with a small writing desk and chairs in abundance. Two lockers, one on each side, extended the whole length of it, and in them were stored away the hammocks in which the crew slept, the dishes, knives, forks and other things belonging to the table, and there was also plenty of space for the Club's hunting and fishing accoutrements. The top and sides of the lockers

were upholstered, and they were supplied with pillows so that they could be used as lounges or beds.

Under the hatchway, which opened into the cabin from the deck, was suspended a long, wide board, painted and varnished like the rest of the furniture. This was the table. When in use it was lowered into the cabin and kept in position—not by legs, like ordinary tables, but by polished iron rods which came down from the beams overhead. If that table could have found a tongue it would have told some interesting stories of the glorious times the Club and their friends had had while seated around it—of the quantities of roast duck, venison, oysters, catfish, quails, and other good cheer that had been placed upon it by old Sam, the cook, to be swept off by the hungry young yachtsmen; of the jokes that had been passed, and the funny things that had been said after the cloth was removed, and oranges, raisins, almonds and lemonade brought on; and of the speeches that had been made, the stories that had been told, and the hearty applauding blows that had been showered upon it by the Club as Featherweight finished singing one of his favorite songs. And not only the table, but everything else in the cabin was associated in the

minds of the Club with some exciting cruise or some pleasing event. It was no wonder that they liked to be there, for a more cosy and comfortable apartment could not have been found anywhere.

In the hold of the schooner were stowed away the water-butts, the seven tons of stone-coal that served her for ballast, extra sails and ropes, two large anchors with cables complete, a chest of carpenter's, calker's, and sail-maker's tools, an abundance of fuel for the galley—in fact everything that the little vessel could possibly need during a voyage could be found here. Walter, besides superintending the building of the yacht, had provided the outfit himself, and consequently there was nothing wanting. Everything was kept in the best order, too. There was never a rope out of place, or a drop of paint or grease on the deck. She was a model yacht. We have been thus particular in describing her because she is an old favorite of ours; and, as we shall have a good deal to say about her and her exploits, we want everybody to know how she looks.

"All hands stand by to get ship under way," shouted Perk, repeating the order Walter had given him.

The boys sprang at the word, and in five minutes more the mainsail, foresail and jib had been run up, and the yacht began to careen as she felt the wind, as if impatient to be off. Eugene went to the wheel, Wilson and Bab cast off the lines, the Banner raised herself almost on her side, and taking a bone in her teeth, went tearing down the bayou at a terrific rate of speed.

"Now, I'll tell you what's a fact," said Perk, pulling his collar up around his ears and moving back into the standing-room to get out of the reach of the spray which was dashing wildly about the bows, "this feels natural. It is perfectly delightful. Wouldn't she stand a little more, Commodore —just an inch or two? We want to make good time, you know."

Walter looked up at the masts and thought she would bear the topsails; but just as he was on the point of telling Perk that he might have them given to the wind, he recollected that Eugene was at the helm. Knowing that he was a very careless, and even reckless fellow, and that he would almost as soon carry away a mast or capsize the boat as to luff an inch, the young captain said he thought

he would make the run with the canvas he had already hoisted.

"Well, then," said Perk, "as the work is over until we reach the village, Eugene and I can sail her. You and Bab and Wilson consider it your watch below and turn in. I'll call you when we come in sight of the wharf."

Walter thought this good advice. He went down into the cabin and closing the door, thus shutting but all sounds of the wind and the waves, arranged a bed on the lee locker, and stretched himself upon it. Bab and Wilson came down one after the other, and before the yacht had left her anchorage a mile behind, all three were sleeping soundly. When Eugene came in to call them about one o'clock the lights on the wharf were in plain sight.

There was only one berth at the wharf in which a vessel could lie with safety during a high wind, and it was already occupied by a little schooner which was evidently getting ready to begin her voyage that night; for her crew were busily engaged in loading her. Walter would have been astonished had he know what consternation the sudden appearance of his yacht produced in the minds of at least three of that schooner's company.

A foremast hand, who was assisting another in rolling a hogshead of hams up the gang-plank, ceased his work the instant his eyes rested on her, and leaving his companion to himself, dived down into the hatchway. Two men who were walking up and down the quarter-deck, arm in arm—one dressed in broadcloth and the other in rough sailor garments—stopped and gazed at her with mouth and eyes wide open. They conversed a moment in low, hurried tones, and then the man in broadcloth beat a hasty retreat down the companion ladder; while the other pulled his tarpaulin down over his forehead, turned up the collar of his pea-jacket, and having by these movements concealed every portion of his face except his eyes and whiskers, thrust his hands into his pockets and sauntered up to the rail.

"Schooner ahoy!" shouted Walter, as the Banner dashed up.

"Hallo!" was the reply.

"I'd like to tie up alongside of you for about five minutes."

"Can't do it," answered the master of the schooner, for such he was. "We're going to sail immediately."

"All right. When you are ready to start, I'll get out of your way. Will you stand by to catch a line?"

The captain of the schooner, although he heartily wished the yacht a hundred miles away, could not well refuse to listen to so fair a proposition as this. He caught the line as it came whirling over his head, and made it fast on board his vessel; and in ten minutes more the Banner was lying alongside the schooner, and Walter and Wilson were walking up the street as fast as their legs could carry them —one to call on Mr. Craven, and the other to find his father and Mr. Chase. The rest of the Club remained on board to watch the yacht. Perk and Bab paced the deck, talking over the exciting events of the day, and wondering what else was in store for them, while Eugene clambered over the rail and went on board the schooner. He took his stand at the fore-hatch and looked down into the hold, where some of the crew were at work stowing away an assorted cargo, and the first thought that passed through his mind was, that for a vessel of her size she had very little capacity. What would he have thought if he had known that there was another hold under the one he was looking into;

that it was filled with a variety of articles that had that very afternoon been brought from New Orleans in wagons, and which were to be smuggled into Cuba; and that in a dark corner among those articles Fred Craven lay, still bound as securely as he was when we last saw him? If Chase had been there he could have told some strange stories about that schooner; but as none of the crew of the yacht had ever seen her before (the reason was that she always left and entered port during the night), they took her for just what she appeared to be—a trader.

While Eugene stood looking down into the hold, the master of the schooner, a short, thick-set, ugly-looking man, with red whiskers and mustache, came swaggering up and tried to enter into conversation with him. He wanted to know whose yacht that was, what she had come there for, where she was going, why Walter and Wilson had been in such haste to get ashore, and asked a good many other questions that Eugene did not care to answer. He could see no reason why he should tell the man the Club's business; and the latter, finding that he could get nothing out of him, turned on his heel and walked off.

In half an hour Walter and Wilson returned, accompanied by Mr. Chase and Mr. Craven. Wilson's father was out of town, and consequently he had not seen him. They were overwhelmed with astonishment at the stories the boys had told them, and Eugene thought as he looked into Mr. Craven's face and glanced at the butt of the navy revolver which protruded from the inside pocket of his coat, that he wouldn't like to be in Pierre's place if Fred's father ever met him. They were impatient to get under way. They hurried across the deck of the schooner—passing directly over the head of one of the boys they were so anxious to find, and so close to him that he heard the sound of their footsteps—and springing over the yacht's rail lent a hand in hoisting the sails, and obeyed Walter's orders as readily as any of the crew. The master of the schooner saw them as they stepped upon the deck, and pulled his collar up closer around his face; and when the yacht veered around and filled away for the Gulf, he hurried below to talk to the man in broadcloth.

Under a jib and close-reefed main and foresail, the Banner made good weather of it when she reached the Gulf. She skimmed over the waves

like a bird, and, guided by Bab's careful hands, never shipped so much as a bucket of water. As the lights in the village began to fade away in the distance, other lights came into view in advance of them—a red and a green light. Then the boys knew that they were not alone on the Gulf, for those lights were suspended from the catheads of some approaching vessel. Like old sailors, they began to express their opinions concerning the stranger. She was a sailing-vessel, because if she were a steamer they would see the lights in her cabin windows. She was not bound to New Orleans, for she was not headed that way—she was coming toward them. She was going to the village, and was, most likely, some small trader like the one they had left at the wharf.

"Better keep away a little, Bab," said Walter. "We don't care to go too close to her in this wind."

Bab altered the course of the yacht a point or two, and in a few minutes the position of the lights changed, showing that the vessel in front of them had altered her course also, and that she intended to pass close to the yacht whether her captain was willing or not. Believing from this that the stranger

had something to say to him, Walter brought his trumpet out of the cabin and walked forward. The lights continued to approach, becoming more and more distinct every moment, and presently a trim little schooner hove in sight and came up into the wind within hailing distance. Walter also threw the yacht up into the wind, and waited for the stranger to make known his wants.

"Schooner ahoy!" came the hail out of the darkness.

"Ay, ay, Sir!" replied Walter through his trumpet.

"What schooner is that?"

"The yacht Banner, from Bellville, bound for Lost Island. What schooner is *that?*"

"We want to send a boat aboard of you," shouted the voice, without replying to Walter's question.

"Very good, sir. What schooner is that?"

Still no reply. The stranger evidently did not care to tell who and what she was. Walter was amazed at this want of courtesy, and wondering why a vessel that he had never seen before should want to send a boat aboard of him, sprang down from the rail and looked at the schooner through his night-glass. All he could make out was that

her hull was long and narrow and sat low in the water, that her masts were tall and raking, that her sails looked much too large for her, and that taken altogether she was a very handsome vessel, and plainly a swift sailer. While Walter was looking at her, her boat came into view. It was crowded with men, and as it approached within the circle of light thrown out by the lanterns that Perk and Eugene held over the side, Walter saw that they were dressed in the uniform of the revenue cutter service, and that they were all armed. Even the two officers who sat in the stern-sheets wore their swords. Walter, more bewildered than ever, looked toward Mr. Craven for an explanation; but the blank look on that gentleman's face showed that he did not understand the matter any better than Walter did. Before either of them could say a word, the revenue officer boarded the yacht, followed by some of their men—the former staring at Walter and his crew with an air of surprise, and the sailors looking all around as if expecting an attack from some quarter.

"Who's the master of this craft?" asked one of the officers.

"I am, sir," replied Walter.

"You!' exclaimed the lieutenant. The surprise he had at first exhibited seemed to be greatly increased by this answer. He looked at his companion, then swept his eyes all around the vessel, and finally turned them upon the young commander, whom he scrutinized closely. "You're beginning this business rather early in life, are you not? You are not just the sort of a fellow I expected to see, and neither are your crew the desperadoes I thought them."

"I don't understand you, sir," said Walter.

"You will soon enough. May I trouble you to show me your papers?"

"My papers! I haven't any."

"Ah! I thought so. Mr. Butler," added the lieutenant, turning to his companion, "we've got them at last. Bring your men aboard and assume charge of the vessel. I will take the captain and these gentlemen on board the cutter, and the rest of the crew you will put under guard. Follow in our wake when we fill away for Bellville."

Walter and the rest of the Club were struck dumb with amazement. The former looked at the lieutenant to see if he was really in earnest, then at the sailors who began to clamber out of the boat,

and tried tc protest against what he regarded as a most unwarrantable and high-handed outrage; but he could not find words strong enough to express his indignation. Mr. Craven, however, stepped forward and spoke for him.

"Mr. officer," said he, "may I ask you to explain the meaning of this?"

"Certainly. We have a description of a smuggler that has been eluding us for a long time, and this vessel answers that description perfectly. We think you are the gentlemen we have been looking for, and we are going to take you back to Bellville with us."

"Oh!" exclaimed Walter, drawing a long breath of relief; "but you have made a great mistake, a most ridiculous mistake."

"You certainly have," said Mr. Craven. "We are all well known in Bellville, and assure you that we and our vessel are all right. My brother is collector of the port."

"I know him, but I don't know you."

"We don't want to go back to the village," continued Mr. Craven. "A matter of the utmost importance to this gentleman and myself demands our immediate attention. You never saw a smuggler

fitted up like this yacht. Look about her, and you can easily see that she has no place for stowing away a cargo."

"That is no part of my duty," replied the officer. "I was told what to do under certain circumstances, and I must obey orders. I'll trouble you to step into this boat."

By this time the yacht was in full possession of the cutter's men. The boy-crew had been ordered below, and were now in the cabin under arrest; a sailor had taken Bab's place at the wheel, and Lieutenant Butler stood on the quarter-deck with Walter's speaking-trumpet in his hand. It made Walter angry to see his beloved yacht under the control of strangers; but knowing that there was but one way out of the difficulty, he sprang into the boat, followed by Mr. Chase and Mr. Craven.

"Don't take it so much to heart," said the latter, addressing the dejected young captain. "This man is only a second lieutenant, and of course he is acting under orders. When we arrive on board the cutter we'll talk to the captain. If he wants to find the smugglers we can tell him where to look for two of them."

Walter caught at the encouragement thus held

out, as drowning men catch at straws; but his hopes fell again as soon as he found himself in the presence of the captain of the cutter. The latter, who was a very pompous man, and for some reason or other seemed to think himself of considerable importance, listened to the report of his officer, and after telling him that he had done perfectly right, and that the prisoners looked like a desperate lot, turned on his heel, and ordered the first lieutenant to fill away for Bellville. Mr. Craven tried to gain his ear for a moment, but the captain told him rather sternly that he was very busy just then, and would attend to him after awhile.

Walter had not been long aboard the cutter before he became aware that he was an object of interest to her crew. The officer who had commanded the boat pointed him out to his mess as the captain of the yacht, and they all looked at him with curiosity, especially the young third lieutenants attached to the vessel, who congregated in the waist, and stared at him as long as he remained on deck. Walter was a handsome fellow, as neat and trim as the vessel he commanded, and the lieutenants told one another that he looked every inch a sailor; but they could hardly believe that he was

the chief of the band of outlaws of whom they had heard so much. Walter was nettled by their close scrutiny, and, when the captain of the cutter, unbending a little from his dignity, intimated that, if his prisoners had anything of importance to say to him, they might step down into the cabin, he gladly accepted the invitation. He thought, however, that he and his friends might as well have stayed on deck and kept silent, for the captain wouldn't believe a word of their story. He wasn't going back to Lost Island on any wild goose-chase, he said. There might be two smugglers there with a boy prisoner, and there might not—he neither knew nor cared. When they reached the village he would go with Mr. Craven and his two friends to the collector of the port, and see if they were really what they represented themselves to be, and that was all he would do. That settled the matter; and Walter, greatly disgusted with the captain's obstinacy, bolted out of the cabin, slamming the door after him.

The cutter stopped once on the way to the village long enough to overhaul a schooner that was coming out of the harbor. The second lieutenant boarded her, and when he came back reported that she was

all right. She was the Stella, bound to Havana with an assorted cargo. But she was *not* all right, if the lieutenant had only known it. She had some articles on board that were not mentioned in her manifest, and among them was a boy named Fred Craven.

To Walter's great relief the village was reached at last, and as soon as the cutter had dropped her anchor he stepped into the boat with the captain and the two gentlemen, and put off for shore to visit the collector of the port. Having business on hand that would admit of no delay, Mr. Craven did not hesitate to call him out of his bed to listen to their story and set them right with the captain of the cutter. The collector, little dreaming what had taken his brother into the Gulf at that time of night, laughed heartily at the idea of his being taken for a smuggler; and the revenue captain, finding that he had committed a blunder, apologized so freely and seemed to regret the circumstance so much, that Walter was almost ready to forgive him. Mr. Craven, however, was not so easily appeased, and neither was Mr. Chase. They had lost more than three hours by their forced return, and they did not know what might have become of their boys in the mean time.

We have no space in this volume to relate the further adventures of our heroes. It will be enough to say that the Banner sailed away from Bellville that very night—this time armed with documents that would carry her in safety through a whole fleet of revenue cutters—but her cruise did not end when she reached Lost Island. It extended hundreds of miles beyond it; and what she and her gallant young crew did during the voyage shall be told in "THE SPORTSMAN'S CLUB AFLOAT."

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day, after a hard Saturday's work—the other boys had been out skating on the brick-pond—I shyly broached the subject to my mother. I felt the need of some sympathy. She listened in amazement, and then said: "Why, do you think you could write a book like that?" That settled the matter, and from that day no one knew what I was up to until I sent the first four volumes of Gunboat Series to my father. Was it work? Well, yes; it was hard work, but each week I had the satisfaction of seeing the manuscript grow until the "Young Naturalist" was all complete.

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